WEIRD, EXOTIC, TERRIFYING TALES OF FANTASY!

Fantastic ADVENTURES

AMC

RUARY
25¢

he MAGICIAN
F MISTY CAVE
by NNESHAW

URN ROCK INTO GOLD—OR MEN INTO BEASTS!

PUBLIC DOMAIN ARCHIVE
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MEET the AUTHORS

CHARLES F. MYERS

IN THE interests of back handing any false impressions before they have a chance to get started, Mr. Myers, more commonly known as Charley among his intimates, will tell you that his photograph is plainly and simply an out and out lie. Had the picture been full length, which he insists it should have been just for laughs, you would discover that the well-pressed suit coat tapers off into a very natty pair of baggy duck pants and the latest thing in well worn sneakers. A native Californian, all six feet of him, he does not put in with the coat and tie set, let Esquire frown down its elegant nose as it will. He claims to have been under the influence of a short one . . . a short brunette, that is . . . when the picture was taken, and apologizes forthwith.

Born twenty-seven years ago in the wheat belt of the fertile San Joaquin Valley, he will tell you that he still combs an occasional hay seed out of his hair in spite of the fact that he has been "at large" throughout the country since the age of sixteen. As to the matter of lineage, he appears to be a bit vague. The Scotch, Irish and English seem to have been caught red-handed, however. If any other nationalities were mixed up in the affair (and Charley suspects a great many), they were clever enough to cover their tracks before any definite charges could be brought against them.

He doesn't recall when he was first bitten by the "writin' bug," but guesses that the insidious little creature must have been gnawing away at him for some time, considering its final, devastating influence over him. He prides himself on being the only writer he knows who did not win an essay contest at an early age, thereby forecasting for himself a brilliant literary career. Probably, it all started in the army when friends who were doing USO work persuaded him to try his hand at writing special material for one of their shows. After that he was in business whether he liked it or not. In this connection, he will confess that Toffee, the wayward heroine of his stories, is strictly a war baby, born in a deserted barracks on a desolate, dateless Saturday night. The two of them have been keeping company ever since, which may partly explain why Mr. Myers is still single and still happy . . . and still writing.

At present he has taken up residence in the lower Sierras where he can swim and hike to his heart's content, this in the happy company of a tangle-footed puppy of uncertain parentage, affectionately known as Shmoe. Together, these two consider themselves an unbeatable team and on more than one occasion have provided the neighboring woodsmen with enough laughs to last them out the winter. This is perfectly all right with Charley, who considers entertainment and laughter two of life's indispensables and doesn't mind in the least being on the providing end. His motto, in fact, was "Anything For a Laugh" until the day, during a tennis match, he did a back flip over a net and landed bottom first on the concrete, splitting his trousers neatly up the back before a crowd of howling spectators. Since then it has been revised to read: "*Almost* Anything For a Laugh!" His hasty, self-conscious retreat to the locker rooms is still vivid in his memory.

Asked about writing methods, Charley says that he simply rolls a fresh sheet of paper into his typewriter, lines up a group of assorted characters, and then, mentally, yells, "Go!" After that it's every character, author included, for himself. This technique, of course, invariably leads to headaches when revisions have to be done, but Charley insists that it still adds up

(*Concluded on page* 149)

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

UNSUSPECTED POWER

The Mysterious Influence In The Air You Breathe!

THE SOUL OF THE UNIVERSE is in the air you breathe. Deposited in your blood—with each inhalation you take—is *the intelligence* that directs the course of the planets through the misty reaches of space, and the strange phenomenon of life itself.

What is it that causes your heart to beat, your lungs to expand and contract? What mind directs *the cells* of your being, each in their purpose—some to create bone, others tissue and hair? What *consciousness* pervades these vibratory *globules of life* and gives them awareness of their Cosmic function?

Are you one of the millions who have looked *beyond yourself* for some external Divine Power or agency? Have you searched in vain for some outer sign or word of Divine assurance when in doubt or in need? Now learn of the *unsuspected power* that exists in every simple breath—and that becomes *part of you.* The ancient Egyptians believed that the essence of life was borne on the wings of the air. The Bible proclaims that with the first breath man becomes not just an animated being—but a *"living soul." Try this experiment,* and prove a Vital Life Force exists in the air. When you are in pain or despondent take a deep breath. Hold it as long as comfortable—then notice the momentary relief.

This Amazing Free Book

Would you seriously like to know how to draw upon this Intelligence of the Cosmic, with which the air is permeated? You can use it to awaken the creative powers of your mind, and for making life an experience of *achievement.* Use the coupon below for a free copy of the book, "The Mastery of Life." It tells how in the privacy of your home *you may learn* to use these simple, useful, *natural laws.*

USE THIS GIFT COUPON

Scribe A.M.E. The Rosicrucians (AMORC)
Rosicrucian Park, San Jose, California

I am sincerely interested in learning how to use the mysterious influences of the universe in the betterment of my life. Please send me a free copy of the book, "The Mastery of Life."

NAME_____

ADDRESS_____

Rosicrucians are NOT a religious organization

THE ROSICRUCIANS (AMORC) SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA, U. S. A.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

FEBRUARY 1949

All Features Complete

Trade Mark Registered U. S. Patent Office, No. 373844

WILLIAM B. ZIFF
Chairman of the Board and Publisher

B. G. DAVIS
President

Vice Presidents

GEORGE BERNER
Sales and Advertising Director

H. J. MORGANROTH
Production Director

H. G. STRONG
Circulation Director

Secretary-Treasurer
A. T. PULLEN

Art Director
HERMAN R. BOLLIN

Editor
RAYMOND A. PALMER

Managing Editor
WILLIAM L. HAMLING

Associate Editor
LILA SHAFFER

Art Editor
BRAD PENDLETON

MEET THE AUTHORS
By Charles F. Myers 2
THE EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK
By The Editor 6
DESTINY!
By Carter T. Wainwright 7
STRANGE CREATURES OF THE DEEP
By H. R. Stanton 35
SQUEEZE PLAY
By William Karney 83
THE VINEGAR RIVER
By John Lane 102
BLACK DIAMOND AGAINST BLACK GOLD
By Sandy Miller 103
ROMAN CANDIDATE
By J. R. Marks 119
THE WORLD'S HEATING SYSTEM
By Marvin Kentley 138
THE SCREWY LITTLE QUANTUM
By Frances Yerxa 138
THE TELEVISION MARVEL
By June Lurie 140
RADAR PROBES THE ATOM
By Fran Ferris 141
GRID-BUSTING
By Jon Barry 142
MAYAN TEMPLES
By L. A. Burt 143
BIOLOGICAL WARFARE
By Cal Webb 144
GOING—GONE!
By Marty Mesner 144
SACRED CROCODILE
By Pete Bogg 146
THE NOISY GHOST ON CAPE COD
By Milton Matthew 146
EGYPTIAN BURIAL CUSTOMS
By Walter Lathrop 147
THE COLDEST SPOT
By A. Morris 148
READER'S PAGE
By The Readers 150

Published monthly by ZIFF-DAVIS PUBLISHING COMPANY at 185 North Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill. New York Office, Empire State Building, New York 1, N. Y. Entered as second-class matter, July 9th, 1947, at the Post Office, Chicago, Illinois, under the Act of March 3, 1879. In U. S., Canada, Mexico, South and Central America and U. S. Possessions, $2.50 for twelve issues; in British Empire, $3.50; all other foreign countries, $3.50 for twelve issues. Subscribers should allow at least two weeks for change of address. All communications about subscriptions should be addressed to the Director of Circulation, Ziff-Davis Publishing Company, 185 North Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

VOLUME 11 NUMBER 2

All Stories Complete

THE MAGICIAN OF MISTY CAVE (Novelette—17,000).....by S. M. Tenneshaw..... 8

Illustrated by Rod Ruth

The terrible forces of creation pulsed through the cave—controlled by a madman's mind! . . .

"OUT OF THIS DUST . . ." (Short—6,000).....by Charles Recour..... 36

Illustrated by Julian Krupa

He had never known peace or love, only the horror of atomic war—but then he met Seryl . . .

TOFFEE TURNS THE TRICK (Novelette—20,000).....by Charles F. Myers..... 46

Illustrated by Virgil Finlay

Marc swallowed the fixage pill by mistake and found himself a babe in arms—Toffee's, that is . . .

PINK HUMANS AREN'T REAL! (Novelette—11,000).....by Edgar Polk..... 84

Illustrated by Robert Keys

Rhadamanthus was a little pink elephant who knew one thing: pink *humans* couldn't exist! . . .

HAPPY TO DIE (Novelette—10,300).....by R. K. Dirk..... 104

Illustrated by Julian Krupa

Ken Hanson wanted Sharon more than anything else in the world—the *next* world, of course . . .

THE GREATEST PAINTER IN THE WORLD (Novelette—11,000)..by E. M. Michalske..... 120

Illustrated by Wilbur Adam

Rentbottom mounted the steps to artistic fame—with the help of a peculiar *ladder* . . .

Front cover painting by Arnold Kohn, illustrating a scene from "The Magician of Misty Cave."

Copyright 1948, ZIFF-DAVIS PUBLISHING COMPANY
Member of the Audit Bureau of Circulations

We do not accept responsibility for the return of unsolicited manuscripts or artwork. To facilitate handling, the author should enclose a self-addressed envelope with the requisite postage attached, and artists should enclose or forward return postage. Accepted material is subject to whatever revision is necessary to meet requirements. Payment covers all authors', contributor's and contestants' magazine rights in the U.S.A. and all other countries in the article and/or illustrations and for publicity and promotion in connection therewith and will be made at our current rates upon acceptance. All photos and drawings will be considered as part of material purchased. The names of all characters that are used in short stories, serials and semi-fiction articles that deal with types are fictitious. Use of a name that is the same as that of any living person is coincidental.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

WE'RE starting off this issue with a humdinger of a fantasy by popular S. M. Tenneshaw. You've already seen the title on the cover (and a mighty nice cover it is too!) so you're probably wondering just what the "Magician of Misty Cave" is all about. Well, this is probably one of the most unusual stories we've presented in a long time, for it starts out with an escaped lunatic from an insane asylum and winds up in a cave of strange, magical forces—forces produced and controlled by only one thing—a very special type of mind. Yep, you've guessed it, an *insane* mind!

We don't mean to imply here that insanity may be the root of creation, but we will say that Tenneshaw did a marvelous job of portraying a madman with a wonderful gift. Of course, as in all wonderful things, there must be a catch. But just what the "catch" is in this story, you'll have to find out for yourself. All we'll add is that we feel you'll really enjoy this yarn. So start reading . . .

CHARLES RECOUR comes through this month with a really top-notch yarn. "Out of This Dust . . ." is the type of story that you will read and not easily forget. You may even find yourself reading it again. And that wouldn't be a bad idea at that! Chuck used as his theme the next war—an atom war. Then he shows you through the eyes of a young Rad-tank Officer, just what effect upon man the next war will have. This is a grim story, and it would do the world a lot of good to read it and take heed of its warning. For what Recour depicts *could* happen. But lest you think man's future is entirely hopeless, we'd like to reassure you that even in the face of complete disintegration of society, some men will struggle through safely to rebuild man's shattered world. You can easily see where the title fits in. So we highly recommend "Out of This Dust . . ." and feel that you'll echo our own enthusiasm with applause . . .

IN NOVEMBER of last year we presented a new "Toffee" story for your enjoyment. Your response was so terrific that we had to get Charles F. Myers by long distance phone and tell him to hurry up with the new long novelette he was working on, continuing the hilarious adventures of the "dream-girl" and her inimitable Marc Pillsworth. Well, you'll find the result of that telephone conversation in this issue as "Toffee Turns the Trick." There isn't much we can say about a "Toffee" story, so we won't even try to tell you about this new one—for "Toffee" speaks for herself! We would like to add, however, that you'll find a biography and photo of the author on page two. Your many requests to know more about "Toffee's" creator are thus answered. So after you read a little about Myers himself, you can turn to page forty-six and get set for an hilarious interlude of pleasant reading.

YOU'VE heard about the "pink elephants"? Well, this month we present a new writer to our pages, Edgar Polk, who says, and very loudly, "Pink Humans Aren't Real!" This is the story of a little pink elephant who saw, of all things, pink humans. Since a pink elephant doesn't really exist, then it would follow that pink humans are in the same category. . . . Or would it? Well, we'll let you decide that for yourself after you finish reading the story. Polk has come through with a neat little yarn, and we'll bet you'll be asking for more . . .

R. K. DIRK is also a new writer to our pages. As his first contribution he presents a story entitled, "Happy to Die." An odd title, with an odd thought behind it. But when you read the story you'll begin to understand why the young man involved was so anxious to die. We won't tell you anything more about it here. We'll let the story speak for itself.

FINISHING up this issue we find the third new writer to hit our pages this month. E. M. Michalske is his name, and the story, "The Greatest Painter in the World." Now that we think of it, this is really an occasion—the new writers are really showing that they have plenty of talent. The "regulars" are getting quite a bit of strong competition! . . . Anyway, this "first" story of Michalske's is one of those yarns that builds up slowly, with plenty of suspense and intriguing adventure—with a neat twist ending. We think you'll like it. . . . Which just about winds up shop for this month. Next month we'll present a great new Livingston novel, "City of Sand." You'll find plenty of thrills waiting for you in over 30,000 action-packed words of the type of story Berkeley is famous for. So watch for it! And of course there'll be many other stories by your favorite writers. So see you then.—WLH

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

DESTINY!

By CARTER T. WAINWRIGHT

The philosophy behind a word of strange magical powers . . .

DESTINY, Fate, Determinacy! What a wealth of magic lies hidden in those words. For five thousand years philosophers have pondered on the subtleties hidden within them and have come to some startling conclusions. Roughly the world can be divided into two groups of people, regardless of their religious affiliations. There are those who are determinists—fatalists—and those who are indeterminists—believers in free will.

Prior to the rise of modern science in the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries, probably the majority of the Western world believed in free will, thinking that chance and probability were of more importance than things like fate and destiny. In fact it was the fashion to ridicule the Mohammedans who shrugged their shoulders and said "Kismet," i.e. "fate." The followers of the Prophet believed that everything was fore-ordained and that Man could not change the pattern.

With the rise of science, the Western world oddly enough, began to see that there was something to this doctrine. Scientific laws were formulated and it appeared that no matter what the incident, there was a sort of chain of "cause-and-effect." This linkage seemed to exist whenever any scientific advance was made. When an event was observed, by either observation or inference, a cause could always be assigned to it.

Philosophers and scientists of the time were fond of saying—in fact to quote the great French mathematician, Lagrange, "given the state of the particles in the universe now, I will predict their state at any time hence"—or words to that effect. This seemed reasonable enough in the light of the law of cause and effect, although it mitigated against the delights of free will.

Were we then, philosophers asked, just puppets dancing on the end of a string? If we were to question the physical science of the time, the answer would appear to be, yes. This was strangely like the Muslim belief in fate.

And so up until the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, it was a pretty well established law of general science that everything had to have a cause. It was a thorny problem in the sides of both scientists and philosophers, as well and theologians, for such a law seemed to contradict the theological belief in the determination of will. "I choose to do thusly; it is my will"—did not rest well with the scientists, on the other hand. Probably this was partially the basis of the continual warfare between the clergy and the world of science.

THEN came a bombshell! The era of modern physics began. It started when Madame Curie discovered the significance of radioactivity. Atoms were observed to explode, apparently without any rhyme or reason. There was no cause for this particular atom of radium blowing up. It just spontaneously blew up without any cause. It was easy to predict the general number of atoms of radium that exploded, but you could never, never say, that "atom number 4084 is going to be the next to explode."

Then with the advance of physics, some discoveries were made concerning particles like electrons. An electron it has been learned will never give either its exact position or its exact velocity. You can know something about both but never exactly about either. It is as if the electron has a mind of its own. This was called the "Unbestimmtheit Prinzip" or Principle of Uncertainty by the Physicist Heisenberg who discovered it.

A lot of other facts came to the attention of philosophers, scientists and theologians. All of them seemed to say, "there is a principle in nature, which can be called 'free will' and which you will find is the only law, so throw away your ideas of cause and effect and start from scratch."

It appears now that this is the governing principle. It looks as if Fate, Destiny, Chance, Probability or call it what you will, is the only thing we may know about directly. Lagrange's statement as made above is false. He could never know the state of the universe anytime, no matter how small that time increment—nature has stopped that.

Thus we are the masters of our destiny. We control what we want to do and there are no hidden causes compelling us to behave in one certain way. Those famous words of Omar Khayyam, that fatalist of the first order, are not exactly true.

Our wills are like chance. We do as we wish for no apparent reason though there may appear to be one. If we trace it far enough back however we generally come to a position where there was an arbitrary movement made which was totally unrelated to any simple cause.

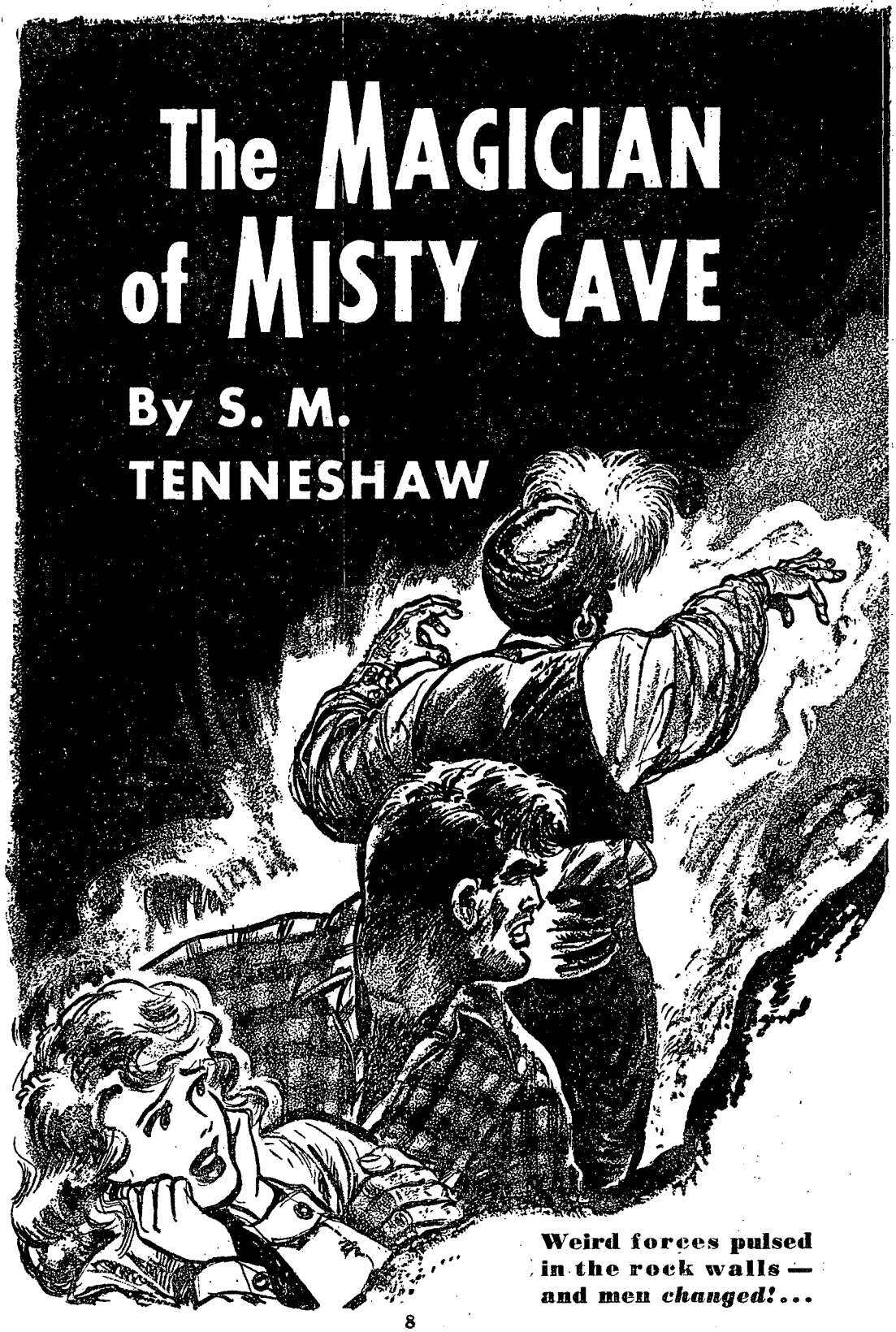
Destiny and Fate—what are you?

* * *

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

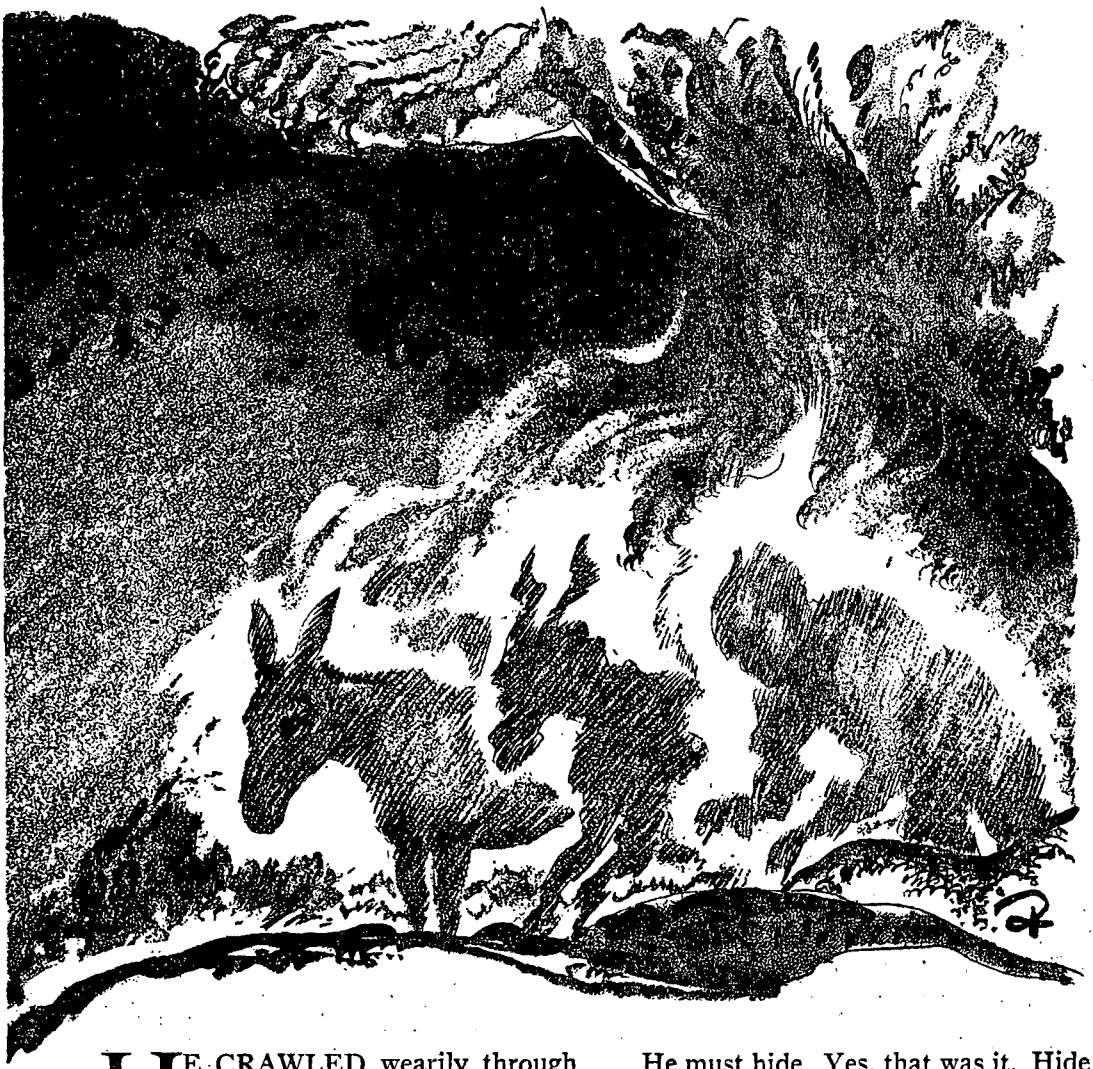
The MAGICIAN of MISTY CAVE

By S. M. TENNESHAW



Weird forces pulsed in the rock walls — and men *changed!*...

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



HE CRAWLED wearily through the rocky canyon, his breath coming in deep tortured gasps, his eyes pale and tired, and yet filled with a cunning light.

He had eluded them at last.

The thought burned its way through him and gave him new life.

They'll never get me now! The beasts! I'll never go behind their bars again! Hah! They thought they were so cunning! An insane man couldn't escape from their puny institution—they were right — an insane man couldn't escape—but I did!

The thoughts screamed through his mind, forced him to move again.

He must hide. Yes, that was it. Hide where they would never find him. He moved through the rocks, his eyes searching.

And then he saw it.

Almost hidden among the rocky crevices of the gorge was a narrow opening. A fissure in the rocky walls, a black, forbidding hole.

His eyes stared at it for a long moment. And then the thought screamed through his mind. A refuge—a cave—it would be *his* home!

He scrambled to his feet and staggered toward the hole in the rock wall. His eyes laughed now with a mad laughter. *Let them try and find m*

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

now! Let them try!

The black hole swallowed him up.

He panted in the darkness for a long time, his breath coming in short whimpering gasps. And as his eyes became accustomed to the darkness, new sensations began to gnaw at him.

He was thirsty.

He thought of long rivers of cool sparkling water. Water to wipe the thirst from his throat.

He was hungry.

He thought of tables of food. Food to wipe the hunger from his belly.

He thought. He thought.

And then the darkness began to lift from the walls. His eyes began to see more clearly, and his thinking stopped.

Somewhere ahead, in the misty shadows of the cavern, he saw a strange radiance begin to pulse. It emanated from the rocky walls, a soundless, wavering, iridescent radiance. With each passing second it grew stronger.

He got to his feet again from the rocky floor of the cave and moved curiously forward. The radiance had not been there before. Nothing but darkness had been there.

He moved further. And as he moved he saw the cavern expand before him. From a narrow, almost invisible fissure in the rocky walls outside, it now grew into a chamber of great size, and he could see other openings in the far wall of the chamber, leading into other, but still black, caverns.

He sat in the middle of the great rocky chamber, still and quiet on the floor, his eyes peering, his mind pondering.

And as he pondered, the radiance grew. Tiny flames now. Flames without heat licked from the walls, shimmering flames.

He stared at them, thought about them, and they grew.

And as they grew the hunger and thirst inside him seemed to grow. They grew until they were desperate longings.

Food! I must have food! And water —my throat burns—I must have water! I'm safe now—they'll never catch me —but I must have food and water!

The thoughts thundered in his mind. And with the thoughts, many other, vague, mad thoughts. Thoughts he was not aware of himself. But the thought of food and water was greatest. He rocked with the thought.

The flames on the rocky wall leaped higher. And then suddenly a mist appeared before him. A great shimmering mist of grey vapor. He recoiled in sudden fear of the mist, a whimpering sound in his throat.

And then the mist vanished.

The whimper in his throat changed. It became a sharp cry of surprise. His eyes stared in puzzled eagerness at—

There was a table. A long narrow table. Sitting on the floor of the cave a few feet away from him. Where the mist had appeared and vanished.

And on the table was stacked food. Heaping piles of food, meats, fruits, vegetables. And there was water. Water in gleaming pitchers. Cool, clear water. Water to still the burning in his throat.

He uttered a small cry of glee and scrambled to the table. His fingers tore into the food, stuffing his mouth with it. He spilled the water in huge draughts into his mouth from one of the pitchers. He ate and drank . . .

HE SAT back at last upon the floor, the hunger gone. The thirst no longer there. His body felt renewed. Life poured into his tired muscles.

He got up then and walked slowly around the table. He stared at it now, a strange light in his eyes. He could think about the table now.

And as he thought, vague, curious

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thoughts, he wondered suddenly how the table had gotten there. The table with its stacks of food and gleaming pitchers of water.

He did not question it with a scientific logic. He wondered merely with a detached curiosity. He thought about it.

And as he thought he remembered. The mist. That shapeless grey mist. The mist that had appeared out of nowhere to bring him the food and water when he had thought about them. *Thought about them!*

He clapped his hands in glee. It was so simple. He should have known it. Of course!

He stared at the table, his eyes bright and cunning. He thought about the table. He no longer needed it. He thought that it was gone.

The grey mist appeared again. It came with the sudden leaping of radiant flames from the rocky walls of the cavern. The mist enveloped the table, hid it from his sight.

But this time he did not back away from the mist in sudden fear. He knew there was nothing to fear—now.

The mist faded. And with it, the floor of the cavern was empty.

The table and its contents were gone.

He stared at the empty space before him and then his eyes rose to watch the flames on the walls. They had quieted now, lessened to a faint pulsing of radiant light.

And as he looked at them, another thought pounded through his mind. They were *his* flames. The mist was *his*—this cavern was *his*.

He laughed then. And his laughter was a mad sound echoing through the cavern.

"And they said *I* was mad! And they put me behind bars in a padded cell! *I* who control the forces of creation!"

He laughed again, his words and laughter booming away into silence.

He sat on the floor of the cavern then, suddenly exhausted. He must have sleep. Sleep that would replenish his tired body.

He looked at the glowing walls. And he thought.

The flames leaped up again, billowed outward in a heatless radiance.

He thought harder.

And the grey mist appeared, thickened, whirled before him, and then vanished.

He stared in satisfaction at the bed. It was big and roomy. Its mattress was thick and he knew, soft. And the sheets were white and spotless.

He moved to the bed and sank his tired body upon it. He would sleep now. He would rest. And afterward . . .

The pulsing radiance grew dim, but ever-present, as his eyes closed in a deep slumber.

JAKE BRAMM lifted the shot of whiskey and downed it in a quick movement. Then his eyes sought out the bartender.

"Bring me another—make it two."

He sat on the bar stool, his big body hunched forward over the bar, his fingers drumming impatiently on the mahogany surface.

The bartender filled two more shot glasses quickly and quietly. He placed them before Jake Bramm and then went back to the other end of the bar to listen to the radio. That made five shots he had poured the stranger in the past ten minutes. It was none of his business how much a man drank, but he knew from past experience that a man who drank as quickly, and as forcefully, as this man did, had something on his mind. Something that was none of his business.

Bramm lifted one of the two shot

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

glasses and stared at it for a moment. Then, as the music from the radio grew louder, he turned his eyes again to the bartender.

"Do you have to have that damn thing playing?"

The bartender looked at him coolly. "I'll turn it down if it's bothering you. But I always listen to the evening newscast. It'll be on in a few minutes."

Bramm grunted and turned back to his drink. He raised it to his lips and downed it in a quick swallow. Then he stared at the glass, his mind a hum of thoughts.

Crandon, Arizona. A stinking town. A far cry from Chicago and the glittering nightlights of Randolph street. Chicago. He breathed a sigh. He had been lucky to get away so easily. Just he and Fred Torelli. It had been a close shave, with the federal men right on their tail. He wondered how the rest of the boys were making out. Of course, the feds had nothing on them, weren't even interested in them. It was *him* they were after. He was the brains.

He smiled grimly to himself. Well, they hadn't caught him. And they wouldn't. By tomorrow night he and Fred would be over the border. Mexico would swallow them up until the heat was off. And once his lawyers had straightened out things with the government on that damned income tax rap, he'd be able to come back. The boys would be waiting . . .

He picked up the second shot of whiskey and downed it. Then he lit a cigarette with a grim movement. O.k., they were having their day now. But the time would come. He'd show them. He had always been a big man. And he was still a big man, even if he was running right now. His time would come.

The radio at the end of the bar poured forth the steady, monotonous voice of a newscaster.

"—are the new World Series Champs. Tucson. Authorities are still puzzled and alarmed over the escape of a dangerous inmate of the Warfield Asylum for the Insane. A state-wide search has been ordered, and has been under way for the past forty-eight hours, thus far with no success. The following description—"

The voice droned on and Bramm ignored it. He drew in on his cigarette and was about to order again from the bartender when suddenly his ears picked up.

"Chicago. Jake Bramm, last of the bigtime racketeers escaped the trap laid for him by federal agents. Ironically enough, Bramm, who has probably been the direct cause of many gang killings, was being sought on an income tax evasion charge. Just where Bramm has fled to is thus far uncertain, but authorities say they are on his trail and he will be apprehended shortly."

BRAMM'S lips tightened into a thin line as he heard the report. Then slowly he smiled. So they were on his trail. Well, that was interesting. The newscast droned on.

"Crandon. The atomic research laboratory outside Crandon will be strengthened by the addition of Del Merritt, nationally known geologist. Mr. Merritt is being sent from Washington to complete certain important work, the details of which will be made known shortly. Merritt is scheduled to report in town sometime within the next week. He will work in close cooperation with Dr. Martin Kingsley, head of the research laboratory in Crandon. At this time—"

The voice droned on and Bramm lost interest. The one thought in his mind was the report that concerned him. Wouldn't that fool of a bartender lose his smug manner if he knew he was

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

looking at Bramm! The big man felt a sense of importance. Yes, he was still feared.

And then a sobering thought struck him. Yes, but he *still* wasn't safe. He would have to be careful. And he and Fred would have to move fast. The federal men were no fools, and they had ways . . .

His thoughts broke off abruptly as someone moved alongside him at the bar. He turned his head quickly and then stared in astonishment.

He was looking at a man dressed in one of the weirdest outfits he had ever seen.

He was a short, frail-appearing man, with wide, bulging eyes, and a thin mustache. His clothing seemed to have come from a costume shop, white lace shirt, short embroidered vest, tight-fitting trousers with a wide sash at the waist, and topping it off, a large turban with a feathered plume on top of it.

The bartender too had snapped out of his lethargy. He, Bramm saw, was standing staring at the man, open-mouthed.

The man pounded a closed fist against the bar.

"A glass of your very best champagne."

The words were uttered in a high-pitched voice that had a curious trembling quality to it.

Bramm watched as the bartender eyed the man suspiciously, but reached under the bar to bring out a tall bottle. The bartender put a piece of stemmed glassware on the bar and poured into it.

Bramm watched the turbaned man's eyes as the champagne was poured. The wide eyes held an almost fanatical expression. Then, as the bartender finished, the man reached out and picked up the glass quickly. He raised it to his lips and sipped. Then he put the glass back on the bar and a short laughter bubbled from his lips.

"Not very good champagne—not like *my* creation!"

The bartender shrugged and said, "That'll be one dollar."

The turbaned man's eyes flicked to the bartender's face. Then a short laugh came again. "Oh, but I knew I had forgotten something! I didn't bring any money with me!"

The bartender's face flushed. "Look, bud, I don't know who the devil you are, or what the occasion is for the fancy getup, but I do know that champagne costs a buck a throw here, so pay up!"

The turbaned man's eyes flamed suddenly. Then the fire in them died down and again the laugh.

"I shall have to excuse your crude manners, my son. As to the payment you demand, possibly this will more than make up for it."

With the words he reached into a trouser pocket beneath the sash and drew out a lump of yellow substance and laid it on the counter.

The bartender snorted. "Look, bud, no yellow rock is going to pay for this drink!"

The wide eyes flamed again. "*Rock?* This, my son, is gold—pure gold!"

The bartender's face sneered. "Sure, sure. It's gold. Now how about that buck before I call a cop."

BRAMM reached over the bar suddenly, his fingers closing over the lump of yellow substance. He picked it up and looked at it closely.

For a moment his pulse raced, but his features remained expressionless. He calmly put the yellow rock down upon the bar and reached into his pocket.

"I'll pay for the man's drink. Here." He tossed a dollar bill to the bartender who looked at him curiously. Then the bartender shrugged and picked up the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

money, turning his back on Bramm and the queerly dressed man.

The turbaned man looked over at Bramm.

"That was a noble gesture, my son. A noble gesture. In return I shall make a gift of the gold—to you."

Bramm let a smile cross his thick-set lips. He nodded.

"That's very kind of you, Mr. —"

"You may call me — Aladdin, my son."

Bramm's eyes widened a trifle, then grew thoughtful.

"Tell me, Aladdin—where did you get this—gold?"

Aladdin waved a hand casually. "Why, I created it, my son. With the forces of the Great Mist, I created it."

Bramm passed a quick glance over at the bartender, but the man had gone back to his radio and was not listening to them. Bramm turned back to the turbaned man.

"You created it? You mean there's more than just this one piece?"

Aladdin laughed.

"More, my son? I could change the whole mountain of Misty Cave to gold if I so wished. There is nothing I cannot do—nothing!" His voice rose shrilly on the last words, and again Bramm looked alarmingly over at the bartender. But the man was not listening.

"Just where is this Misty Cave, Aladdin?" Bramm asked quietly.

The turbaned man drew back slightly. A trace of fear crept into his eyes. Then he shook his head slowly.

"That is my secret, my son. You have been kind, but if I told you, *they* might find out."

"They?" Bramm asked.

Aladdin nodded vigorously. "Yes. *They* put me behind bars — but I escaped! And now that I have the *power,* they will never get me again!"

A stunning fact awoke suddenly in Bramm's mind. His thoughts flashed back to the newscast he had just heard. What was it? An inmate of an asylum in Tucson! Could this man be that person? Bramm suddenly felt sure, and then his eyes fell to the yellow rock again. Only he knew it wasn't rock. He could tell by the weight, the appearance. It was gold. It *was* gold.

A crafty smile appeared on Bramm's face as he looked up at the turbaned man again.

"Look, Aladdin," he leaned close to the man, and his voice dropped to a low tone, "I won't tell anyone. You see, *they* are looking for me too! *They* want to put me behind bars—just as they did you!"

Aladdin's face held an astonished look momentarily, then it changed to one of sympathy.

"*They* are after you, too? But then you are in danger, my son. You must hide!"

Bramm nodded. "Yes, Aladdin, but where?"

The turbaned man drew himself up in a pompous gesture.

"I shall hide you, my son. You may come with me to Misty Cave!"

Bramm got off the bar stool and took Aladdin's arm. "Come with me to my room in the hotel. There is one more who is in need of sanctuary. We will take him along with us. Then we shall all be safe . . ."

Aladdin bobbed his head solemnly. "Of course, my son. We shall bring this other person with us. *We* must stick together. *They* are powerful and cunning, but with the *power,* we will defeat them!"

There was a tense eagerness in Bramm as he led the turbaned figure from the room.

DEL MERRITT stood in the hot Arizona sun, sweat running down

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG.
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

his brow. He looked into the hood of the automobile and shook his head. It was beyond him. He had checked the ignition wires all the way to the battery cables, and nothing seemed to be the matter. And yet he knew that there must be a short or a loose wire somewhere that had stalled his car.

He moved his tall, lean body away from the engine of the car and glanced at his wrist watch. It was getting late. It was almost four o'clock now. He was overdue at the Crandon Research Institute, and unless he could get a ride in with some passing motorist he wouldn't arrive until after dark. And while he had never met Dr. Martin Kingsley, he knew that punctuality was one thing that science, and the government, expected.

As the thoughts went through his mind he heard the hum of a motor approaching.

Merritt turned and saw a sleek, red convertible bearing down on him. The car was traveling fast, and was already swerving out into the opposite lane of the highway to avoid his own stalled vehicle.

Merritt stepped out into the highway and waved his arms at the car.

The roar of the convertible's motor died down and there was a slight squeal of tires as the car was braked. Then it had stopped beside him.

Merritt walked around to the driver's side of the car as a blonde head thrust itself into view.

"Hey, mister, that's not a safe way to flag a car down!"

Merritt found himself gazing into a pair of bright blue eyes. The face that went with them was tanned and very pretty, and had a half smile on it.

Merritt grinned. "I'm sorry, miss, guess you're right. . . . My car broke down, and I can't seem to find the trouble."

The girl nodded sympathetically. "That's too bad. Is there anything I can do? Maybe give you a lift to a garage? I believe there's one in Crandon."

Merritt breathed a sigh of relief. "That's mighty nice of you. As a matter of fact, Crandon's my destination. If you're sure it wouldn't put you out. . . ."

The girl laughed. "I guess you stopped the right car. My destination is Crandon too!"

Merritt walked quickly back to his own car and pulled his suitcase from the rear seat. Then, after locking the car up, he returned to the convertible and put his suitcase in the back seat beside the girl's. As he did so he noticed two initials on her suitcase: S.K. Then he was in the front seat beside her, closing the door.

She meshed gears smoothly and the car gathered speed.

"Catching a ride on one of these highways isn't always so easy," she said. "It's not like back East where they travel bumper to bumper."

"I know," Merritt agreed, "I've just come from the East."

The girl turned to him politely, then her eyes went back to the road.

"Is that so? Are you here on business?"

MERRITT nodded. "Yes, for a time." And then suddenly remembering the initials on her suitcase and the fact that he hadn't as yet introduced himself, he said, "My name is Merritt. Del Merritt. I noticed the initials on your suitcase, S.K. Would it be impertinent to ask for a translation?"

The girl turned to him in sudden wonder. Then a light laugh escaped her lips.

"*You're* Del Merritt? The geolo-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

gist?"

Merritt looked curiously at her. "You seem to know more about me than I do about you, miss—"

"I'm sorry," she said, "forgive me if I sounded rude, but you see dad mentioned you in his last letter to me. He's always reticent about talking about his work, but I manage to pry a few facts from him!"

Merritt frowned. "I'm afraid I don't understand . . ."

"I'm Sharon Kingsley, Mr. Merritt. Dr. Martin Kingsley is my father."

Merritt was aware suddenly that his mouth had dropped open. The girl looked at him fleetingly and her light laugh floated not unpleasantly on his ears again.

"This *is* something of a coincidence, Mr. Merritt, it's almost like a page from a novel!"

Merritt found his voice then. "I wasn't aware that Dr. Kingsley had a daughter . . ."

"It hasn't been widely publicized," the girl said lightly. "For some strange reason people never think of scientists as having anything but 'brain-waves' and like phenomena. Certainly never children!"

"I didn't mean it that way," Merritt said hastily.

"I know," she replied, "but I can't blame you for being somewhat surprised. I felt something of the same way when you told me who you were."

"Me? But what's so unusual about me?"

She looked at him again, and for the first time Merritt became aware of the full intensity of her eyes. They were deep and warm, like some hidden sun-fed waters. He had a strange feeling that a man could easily become lost in those waters . . .

"Well," Merritt heard the girl reply to his question, "I'm afraid you don't exactly look like a geologist—I would have expected a much older person."

Merritt grinned. "Some people call thirty-two a ripe old age. As for looking like a geologist, I haven't gotten around to needing horn-rimmed glasses —yet."

She laughed again, and Merritt became aware that he liked hearing her laugh. It was a pleasant sound, one that he knew he would not tire easily of.

"Well, Mr. Merritt, now that we've got the formalities over with, I suppose you'd like to have me drop you at the Institute first?"

Merritt nodded. "I would like to report in before going to town," he said. "And speaking of formalities, considering that we're not exactly likely to be utter strangers, that 'mister' sounds a little too stiff. Try Del."

She nodded pleasantly. "Very well—Del. And my friends call me Sharon. Consider yourself a friend."

MERRITT smiled and settled back in the seat. A thought crossed through his mind that he was very glad his car had broken down so opportunely. He had been looking forward to a siege of dull field work, with no entertaining respite, certainly not such a charming one. He heard the girl talking again.

"I'm taking the left fork here for the Institute. As you may know, it's only a few miles out of town. This will sort of kill two birds with one stone. I was planning on dropping out to see Dad today yet anyway."

Merritt looked out the windshield at the hilly landscape flashing by. They had just passed a fork in the highway, and he could see the sign pointing to Crandon, three miles up that fork away from them.

"Does your father know you're coming?"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Goodness, yes. He's been trying to get me to take a short vacation for the past month. Up until now my business has kept me pretty busy. I operate a fashion design school in Burbank. It's been quite a drive up here!"

"A fashion design school?" Merritt queried. "You don't look old enough—" he stopped the sentence without completing it, realizing suddenly that he had been about to make the same sort of statement she had made about himself.

The girl caught it even as Merritt hesitated. She laughed softly.

"That makes us even. Oh—there's the gate ahead."

Merritt glanced through the windshield again and saw a series of buildings come into view on the left side of the highway, possibly two hundred yards off it. A high fence circled the grounds, and he could see armed guards patrolling the grounds even at a distance.

The girl turned the convertible off the highway and rolled toward the main gate. Once there she stopped and a guard stepped forward.

"Sharon Kingsley," the girl announced. "and Del Merritt. Dr. Kingsley is expecting us."

The guard glanced at them closely for a moment, then examined Merritt's proferred credentials. Then he handed them back and said politely:

"If you'll wait just a moment, I'll check through central office."

Merritt and the girl watched him enter a small wood structure, and through the glass enclosure of the upper half of the hut, they saw him telephone.

Moments later he was back.

"Everything's all right. You can go inside. Dr. Kingsley's office is the first building on your right."

The girl smiled and moved the car through the now open gates.

"SHARON! I didn't expect you until tomorrow!"

Dr. Martin Kingsley, tall, straight-shouldered, and grayed, took his daughter into his arms and kissed her forehead.

"I know, Dad. I left a little sooner than I expected."

Then she moved lightly away from her father and motioned to Merritt.

"Come on in, Del, he won't bite you!"

Merritt walked into the room and stood uncertainly for a moment. Then the girl turned to her father.

"Dad, this is Del Merritt."

The scientist stared at Merritt for a moment, frowning, from his daughter and back to Merritt. Then his face brightened and he smiled.

"You'll have to forgive this rather homey scene, Merritt, but you see, my daughter . . ."

Merritt stepped forward and shook hands. "I know, doctor. Sharon—Miss Kingsley happened to be passing on the highway when my car broke down. It turned out to be a rather fortuitous meeting."

Kingsley turned to his daughter, smiling and shaking a reprimanding finger at her. "I thought you knew better than to pick up strangers, Sharon. However, I'll forgive you—this time."

The girl smiled. "I'm glad, Dad. You see, Del and I are almost old friends!"

Kingsley turned to Merritt. "You'll have to watch your step, young man. My daughter's a great one for turning business into pleasure. And you'll have your work cut out for you here, I'm afraid."

Merritt's face sobered. "Would you like to discuss it now, Doctor, or wait until tomorrow?"

Kingsley glanced at his daughter. "Well, if Sharon will promise not to in-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

terrupt I can give you a pretty clear picture of the situation in a few minutes. I'd like to have you start a preliminary field survey in the morning."

Merritt nodded and the girl politely walked to a far side of the office and sat down. Merritt followed the scientist over to his desk and took a chair. Kingsley walked around behind the desk and sat down facing him.

"I've admired your work intensely, Merritt," Kingsley began, "and I'd like to say that we are glad to have you on our staff here."

Merritt acknowledged the compliment with a nod.

"Now, here in a brief resume is what we'd like to have you do.

"As you know, we are engaged in rather important work in the atomic research field. That part we can discuss later in greater detail. What really concerns you at the moment is the fact that recently, within the past two weeks as a matter of fact, our instruments in the laboratories have picked up some strange radiation, emanating from somewhere in the surrounding hills."

He paused for a moment, and Merritt let a frown cross his face.

"Just what sort of radiations, doctor?"

The scientist spread his hands flat on the desk.

"That is the baffling part, Merritt. We don't know. We've checked with every means at our disposal, but we can't pin it down. It seems to be some sort of radio-activity, and yet, it is not basically that. And what is even more baffling than the radiation itself, is the fact that it has just *recently* appeared."

Kingsley emphasized the last few words before continuing.

"To cover all possible channels we'd like a geological report on this area. It may be that there is some mineral or mineral by-product causing the radiation. You would know more about that."

Merritt nodded. "I take it, doctor, that you're not entirely satisfied as to the natural causes of this radiation?"

KINGSLEY sighed. "In our work, we have to be suspicious of everything. But you're right, in this particular case I am not satisfied that it is entirely because of natural causes."

"That would seem logical, doctor, since you haven't noticed the radiation before. Have you consulted the Federal Bureau of Investigation?"

The scientist's face became suddenly grim.

"That's the strange part, Merritt. You see, the f.b.i. has been very active in the Crandon area recently. You may have heard of a Chicago racketeer named Jake Bramm?"

Merritt nodded, frowning.

"Well, while it seems to have no particular bearing on our particular problem, Merritt, three federal agents traced this Bramm to Crandon, and here the trail has stopped."

"You mean that Bramm left Crandon without a trace?" Merritt asked.

"I mean that Bramm never left Crandon. And what is worse, the agents of the f.b.i. have vanished along with him!"

Merritt sat stunned. "That's strange, doctor. Very strange."

"It's more than strange, Merritt. Because the particular incident I mentioned happened just around the time that our instruments picked up this new radiation. It's almost too much of a coincidence."

"But isn't it rather far-fetched, doctor, that a racketeer would be mixed up in anything involving atomic physics?" Merritt asked puzzled.

Kingsley nodded. "That is the one saving point in the whole business,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Merritt. And that is why Washington sent you here. It's entirely possible that the radiation is due to ore deposits or the like and that somehow we failed to catch them before this. Your survey will prove or rule out that possibility. However, I felt that you should know the full status of the situation, for if our theory is correct that there is some hidden agency at work close by for God knows what purpose, then there is apt to be an element of danger in your work. Certainly the disappearance of three federal agents is something more than sheer coincidence."

Merritt nodded agreement. "All right, Doctor, I believe I understand the situation. I'll make a preliminary survey of the surrounding country in the morning."

Across the room, Sharon Kingsley got to her feet and walked over to the two men. Her eyes were lit by a deep excitement.

"Goodness, I certainly came along at the right time! Racketeers—federal men vanishing—weird radiations! This has all the ingredients of a first-class mystery!"

Martin Kingsley got to his feet and crossed around the desk.

"I knew I shouldn't have spoken to Merritt with you in the room. Now let me tell you something, young lady, this is a serious business, *and* it has no place for your inquisitive little soul!"

The girl pretended shocked hurt. "Dad! I was only going to try and help in my own way—"

"That's exactly what I meant, Sharon," the scientist replied. "What I have said to Merritt is highly confidential information and—"

"And I was only going to say that since Del's car is going to be in the garage for repairs, I'd like to have him use mine—for his survey!"

Merritt got to his feet. "That's very nice of you, but—"

The scientist interrupted him with a wave of his hand. A slow smile appeared on the older man's face.

"I think that's an excellent idea, Merritt. You could use one of the Institute cars, but this will give me a good chance to keep her out of mischief. She'd be likely to go prowling around after you. But we'll nip that possibility in the bud."

Merritt glanced across at the girl and saw a gleam in her eye. But then she quickly glanced away. Merritt's gaze swung back to Kingsley. The scientist was speaking again.

"Now we'll have dinner together in the Institute restaurant, and later, Sharon can drive you back to town. Rooms have been reserved for both of you at the Plaza hotel. I'm sorry we can't put you up here, Merritt, but we're rather crowded as it is. As for Sharon, she wouldn't be allowed anyway."

"I like that!" the girl sniffed. "My own father, the head of the Institute, turning me out in the cold!"

Kingsley looked at her knowingly. "I'm sure my dear that right now you wouldn't have it any other way."

Merritt felt himself flush and tried not to look at the girl, but her eyes caught his.

"You see, Del? He *is* human after all! Come on, let's get to that supper—I'm starved!"

She took both men by the arms and propelled them laughing from the office.

MERRITT finished his breakfast in the hotel restaurant and sat smoking his first morning cigarette. As he sat back relaxed, his mind mulled over the previous evening. It had been pleasant, dinner and the long talk that had followed. And the ride back to

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

town with Sharon Kingsley. The girl was dynamic, her personality a driving force. And behind it all he knew, there lay a soft femininity, an alluring factor that he was becoming all too increasingly aware of.

But then he shut the girl momentarily from his mind and thought of the job he had to do. It shouldn't take too long, possibly a week at most. His preliminary survey of the morning would eliminate most of the area. What was left would require more careful checking and—

He looked up abruptly to find Sharon Kingsley smiling at him. The girl was dressed in a tight-fitting blouse and whipcord breeches. Hiking boots completed the picture.

"Good morning, Del," she said brightly. "Have I time for a cup of coffee before we go?"

Merritt, standing politely to offer her a chair, looked at her in surprise.

"We? Surely you don't mean—"

"But of course I do! It's a lovely morning for a tramp in the hills. I wouldn't miss it for the world!"

Merritt sat down frowning as the girl ordered a cup of coffee from a waitress. Then he shook his head slowly.

"I'm afraid that's out, Sharon. You remember what your father said yesterday."

The girl sniffed. "Dad's always trying to keep me out of 'mischief.' But you're only going on a ride through the hills. . . . Or maybe you don't want my company. . . ."

Her voice took on a pseudo-grieved tone with the last words. Merritt laughed.

"You know it's not that. Don't forget, if what your father says is true, there may be danger. Have you forgotten about the missing federal men?"

Sharon Kingsley shrugged. "Personally, I think it's more melodrama than anything else. And besides, Dad need not know that I went along with you."

Merritt remained undecided. He knew that the thought of having her with him was a pleasant one. But still. . . .

"He wouldn't like it if he found I had disobeyed his orders," Merritt said doggedly.

"Orders were made to be broken!" the girl replied. "Besides, *I* won't tell him. There, that settles it."

Her eyes found and held his. There was an amused brightness in them, and again Merritt and the feeling that it wouldn't be hard to lose himself in those blue depths.

He shrugged, finally. "All right, but it will probably mean my job—and reputation."

"You can always get a job," she chided. "And as to your reputation, you haven't lost that—yet!"

Merritt joined her laughter and the morning suddenly seemed to take on an appearance of happy brightness.

MERRITT pulled the car off the highway and onto a dirt road that wound into the hills. Finally he braked the convertible to a halt and turned off the ignition.

"End of the line. This is where we start walking. I hope you've broken in those boots, you're liable to come back with a nice set of blisters."

The girl opened the car door on her side and got out.

"Don't worry about me, Del. —Well, what do we do first?"

Merritt locked the car up and pointed toward the hills ahead.

"We do just what I said we would. We walk. This is where pleasure ends and business begins."

She bobbed her head in a mock salute. "Yes sir, I'll remember that. Lead on."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Merritt smiled and started off, the girl walking silently beside him.

. . . The sun had crawled its heat-weary way slowly up the skyline. Merritt paused for the hundreth time in the past two hours. Paused to pick up and examine a piece of rock.

He shook his head and the girl at his side queried:

"Nothing unusual yet?"

"Not a thing. I think we can safely rule out this particular area. Shall we go on?"

The girl sighed. "I'm beginning to think this *is* just a business trip. You've hardly said a word to me since we left the car!"

Merritt laughed. "Well, you *did* insist on coming along. I told you what you'd be in for."

"All right, so I asked for it. Well, what next?"

Merritt glanced slowly around him. The hills rose on all sides, and if his guess was correct, there would be no use in tramping through them. But ahead he saw a rocky gorge leading into the hills.

"We might try that gorge. If we don't find anything there, we might as well call it a morning."

The girl agreed with a weary nod. "That suits me fine. I'm set for the biggest lunch *you* can buy me!"

They plodded on toward the gorge. And now, as they walked, the girl seemed to edge closer to Merritt. He was tempted to reach out and take her hand as they walked. But then as the thought crossed his mind, he heard the girl suddenly gasp.

Merritt looked up to find a man suddenly appearing from behind a clump of rocks in the entrance to the gorge. He was a tall man, with close-set eyes and thin, brownish hair. He was holding a gun in his hand, and the weapon was trained on Merritt and the girl.

"All right folks, that's far enough."

Merritt stopped, a puzzled frown on his face.

"Just what's the meaning of this?" he demanded.

The gunman smiled shortly. "The meaning is that this is private property, and we don't like trespassers."

Sudden suspicion filled Merritt's eyes. Private property? Surely Kingsley would have told him about any in the vicinity . . .

"We didn't see any signs or fences," Merritt replied coolly.

The man sneered. "You won't find any. But it's still private property. What are you two doing around here?"

"I'm a government man," Merritt started to say, and then stopped abruptly. Something warned him. It might have been the way the man held the gun. But Merritt felt sure it was the look in his eyes. He didn't look like a westerner. And he didn't talk like one. He had a clipped, curt way of speaking.

The gunman's eyes widened at Merritt's words. Then he stepped purposely forward, the gun held menacingly now.

"So you're a government man? Well that's mighty interesting. Don't make any rash moves, mister. And you either, lady."

SHARON KINGSLEY stepped in closer to Merritt until her body touched his lightly. Merritt could feel a slight tremor sweep through her.

"If this is private property, then we won't trespass," Merritt said, but had the feeling that it was too late now.

The gunman shook his head. "Government men can always look over our land, as long as *we* show them around. Come on, move ahead."

The man stepped aside and motioned with his gun. Merritt glanced fleetingly at the girl, then shrugged and

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

stepped forward.

Beside him, Sharon Kingsley's voice came lowly. "Del, it looks like Dad was right . . ."

Merritt clamped his teeth together grimly. Yes, he knew now that the scientist had been right. There was something going on in these hills, something that had swallowed up three federal agents. And now . . .

They were into the gorge and the gunman behind them said:

"Keep to the right. You'll see a cave entrance up ahead. Don't stop walking when you come to it."

Merritt's eyes scanned the rocky vastness of the side of the gorge as they approached it. Then suddenly his eyes fastened on a dark fissure in the rock. If he had not been looking for it he was sure he might have missed it.

A tenseness built up inside Merritt as he stepped toward that opening. And beside him, the girl suddenly took his hand, her fingers cool and trembling. Merritt pressed them reassuringly without feeling any confidence himself, and stepped through the fissure.

"Keep walking, and remember, I'm right behind you!"

The words fell flatly on Merritt's ears. Holding the girl's fingers tightly in his, he felt the gloom of the cave close around him.

Then suddenly his pulse quickened.

Ahead, the gloom ended. They were traversing a short entrance in the rock walls, and ahead there was a dull radiant light.

Then they stepped into the chamber.

A startled gasp fled from the girl's lips, and Merritt's own breath seemed to catch in his throat.

They were standing in an immense cavern, a cavern so utterly fantastic it held Merritt rooted to the spot.

The rocky walls stretched far above his head on all sides, and the walls glowed with a peculiar radiance. It seemed as if tiny tongues of flame were eating at the rock, and yet, Merritt knew, if they were flames, there was no heat.

But that was only part of it. The cavern was outfitted in the most lavish manner that Merritt had ever seen. The great expanse of rock floor was covered with exquisite rugs. There was lavish furniture, huge overstuffed divans, finely carved upholstered chairs, and at one end of the immense room, a raised dais with a throne on top of it, a throne that glittered in the radiant light with a brilliant golden color. And as Merritt stared at it, he knew suddenly that it *was* gold!

In shocked astonishment Merritt's eyes moved away from the dais. He stared again at the rock walls of the cavern, walls that gave forth an irridescent radiance. He saw now other openings in the walls, openings that obviously led to other rooms.

And then he saw a man step from one of the openings. Even as his eyes fell on the man he heard the gunman behind him call out:

"We've got more company, Boss! A government man and a girl!"

MERRITT'S eyes watched the figure approach the dais and step up to the throne. He was a big man, and as he sat down heavily on the throne, Merritt took a good look at his face, which even from a distance he could see was thick-set with dark bushy eyebrows.

"Bring them up here, Fred," the man said coldly.

Merritt felt the gun nudge him in the back and, still holding the girl's fingers in his, he stepped forward until they both stood at the edge of the dais.

The big man looked down at them a cold smile on his thick-set features.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"So another government man pays us a visit. And this time with a charming companion!"

Behind Merritt, the man called Fred said, "Shall I get Aladdin, Boss? Looks like we got a couple more toys for him to play with."

The big man raised his eyes. "Yes, Fred. Get Aladdin. I'll entertain our *friends,* meanwhile."

Merritt was aware that the gunman left them, but his eyes were riveted to the big man on the throne. He had pulled a gun from a shoulder holster inside his coat and was toying with the weapon as he stared at them again.

Beside Merritt, Sharon Kingsley suddenly spoke up, her voice indignant.

"What is the meaning of all this? Just why are we being detained at the point of a gun, and what is all this?"

The big man stared coldly at the girl.

"I'm sure both of you are in a better position to answer the first question. But I've got a number of questions of my own to ask. And first of all, who are you two?"

Merritt replied, "My name is Merritt. Del Merritt. This is Sharon Kingsley, we—"

The big man's eyes suddenly narrowed. Then his face cleared.

"*Merritt?* Of course, the geologist!"

The big man started to laugh suddenly. His laughter was a booming sound that reverberated through the chamber. Then the laughter died away.

"I don't see anything funny," Merritt said drily. "And you seem to know more about me than I do about you."

The big man nodded. "Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Bramm. Jake Bramm. And the man who brought you here is Fred Torelli. Does that mean anything to you?"

Merritt's breath sucked in sharply. So Kingsley had been right! Bramm never had left the Crandon area—he was here, deep in the hills, hiding in a fantastic cave . . .

"It's really unfortunate that you and Miss Kingsley happened to find this spot," Bramm said smoothly. "Because now that you're here I'm afraid I can't allow you to leave. When Fred said you were a government man I naturally thought you were an agent of the f.b.i. I've already entertained three of those gentlemen."

Merritt felt a cold chill run through him. "What happened to them?" he asked.

Bramm chuckled. "Aladdin took care of them. A remarkable man, my Aladdin. He is responsible for all of this," he waved his arm encompassing the entire chamber. "Hasn't it struck you as strange that all these lavish appointments exist in a cave deep in the Arizona hills?"

"We asked you before what all this was for," Merritt said puzzledly.

"So you did. Well, as I said, Aladdin and his strange powers produced everything. You as a scientist should be vitally interested, Merritt. It is really astounding. You have wondered at the peculiar radiation in this chamber?"

Merritt nodded, not admitting that he was certain now that this was the origin of the strange radiations received at the Crandon Institute.

"Well, I am certain that even the greatest scientists would be baffled by these radiations. You see, Merritt they can *create*—through Aladdin, of course."

MERRITT'S brow clouded in a frown. "Create? Exactly what do you mean?"

Bramm smiled. "You'll find out. In due time."

The girl stared at Bramm quizically. "Who is this person you call Aladdin?"

"A very interesting man," Bramm

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

replied. "Completely insane. And it is because of this insanity that he is able to control the forces of Misty Cave. Control them, that is, to my end."

The big man's words rambled on, and as Bramm talked, Merritt became aware that the big man's eyes were flushed with a strange light. It was the light of power. Complete invincible power.

"To your end?" Merritt asked.

"Exactly. I no longer consider myself a hunted man, Merritt. The law is incapable of touching me—but I can bend the law to my will!"

Merritt was about to reply when he heard footsteps behind them. He turned with the girl to see Fred Torelli approaching, and with him, a strangely dressed man.

He was short, with wide-staring eyes. He was clad in a strange mixture of lace shirt, embroidered vest, a wide sash at his waist, and a full feathered turban crowning his head. A thin mustache twitched nervously on his upper lip.

"We have two more of those who would try to take us away from here, Aladdin," Bramm's voice intoned toward the turbaned man.

Aladdin's wide-staring eyes turned to Merritt and the girl. Merritt felt a chill run through him as he gazed into those eyes. They were not the eyes of a sane man. They were wild, and yet, somehow forceful.

"That is good, my son," Aladdin replied, shaking his head. "*They* will never harm us. The Great Mist will change them just as the others . . ."

"No, Aladdin," Bramm put in smoothly. "We will keep these two in their present form for the moment. They may be of some use to us. I must give the matter thought. You and Fred will take them to one of the inner chambers. There you will create a cell around them. They will be behind bars—even as they would have us be!"

The eyes of the turbaned man flamed in excitement.

"That is excellent, my son. Just as they would have us! It shall be done!"

Bramm smiled grimly. "Good." Then he motioned to Torelli. "Escort our guests to their lodgings, Fred."

The last thing Merritt heard as he and the girl were moved out of the vast chamber and into a small rock corridor that lead eventually to another, smaller cavern, was the loud booming laughter of Bramm as he stared after them.

"O.k. Aladdin, do your stuff," Torelli grinned at the turbaned man.

Merritt stood close beside the girl, suddenly fearful. Her hand was clenched tightly in his. Around them the close walls of the cave room glowed dully.

Aladdin stared at them for a moment, then his arms shot out in front of him and his eyes closed. It seemed to Merritt as if the man's lips were moving slightly, uttering some hidden thoughts, then suddenly Merritt stiffened.

The walls threw off a leaping radiant fire. And as the glow grew, a misty wave crept over Merritt and the girl.

STRANGE forces tore at their bodies, numbing their senses. Then the mist began to swirl faster around them and they heard strange sounds, the clatter of stone and metal. Then the mist vanished.

A sharp cry of fear sped from the girl's lips.

Merritt himself felt like crying out, but in sheer astonishment. A complete wall of stone surrounded them, with a stone door and bars for a window. It was a cell—a cell that had appeared magically out of the mist!

Merritt, staring through the barred door saw Torelli's face light up as the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

man laughed.

"Good work, Aladdin, they won't get out of that in a hurry!"

The gunman turned to go, then looked back at the turbaned man.

"Let them stay just as they are, Aladdin. Remember what Bramm said. They may be some use to us. Don't change them to animals just yet!"

Aladdin bobbed his head. But his eyes were staring at the stone cell. "They shall be behind the bars—the bars they would put me behind if they had the chance!"

Merritt heard Torelli chuckle as he left the cave room, then there was only Aladdin staring at them, his eyes alight with an insane gleam.

"Fools! Did you think you would return me to a captivity behind bars? Now you shall wallow in your cell while I remain free! Do you hear, *free!*"

Merritt glanced quickly at the girl. She was standing, a shocked expression on her face, her eyes not believing what she had seen, her ears not believing what they had heard.

Merritt looked back then to the turbaned man. There was no doubt in his mind now that the man was a raving lunatic. But what did almost make him lose his own sanity was the magical way the cell had appeared around them. It was almost as if this man outside their prison was a mad magician, a conjurer of evil forces. And then he remembered what Torelli's parting words had been. Something about animals . . .

"Tell me, Aladdin," Merritt tried to keep his voice normal as he spoke, "what did Torelli mean about changing us into animals?"

Aladdin laughed, a high-pitched laughter.

"You will see when the time comes! Just as the three *others* tried to take me away—you will become as *they*—beasts of burden!"

Grimly Merritt suddenly knew what the man meant. The three federal agents who had disappeared. They were somewhere in these caverns then!

"Change men into beasts? But that's impossible!"

Aladdin's eyes widened and his head shook slowly. "Nothing is impossible to me—and the Great Mist! It is just as I have said—they are now beasts!"

Merritt forced a laugh. "I don't believe you. It's a trick. You and Bramm are hiding the three men someplace . . ."

The magician drew himself up pompously. "A trick? You do not believe me? I will show you!"

Merritt drew back in sudden fear as the magician raised his hand again and pointed toward the cell. The flames on the walls leaped high, and suddenly the mist appeared around the door. When it had vanished again, Merritt's heart leaped.

The door was gone!

He felt the girl tremble with excitement beside him. "Easy, Sharon," he whispered, "we've got to play along with him as much as we can . . ."

The girl nodded and then Merritt looked back at the magician. His eyes were open again and he was staring at them pompously.

"Come! I will show you your three comrades! I will show you what will happen to you when *we* are finished with you!"

MERRITT and the girl walked cautiously from the cell. Merritt stared at the tunnel from which they had been escorted, but there was nobody in sight.

Aladdin pointed to another opening at the far end of the chamber.

"We will go through that passage," the magician said. "And do not try to escape me!"

Merritt and the girl strode across the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

chamber and into the passage. It led downward, and wound for possibly a hundred feet. Then abruptly they were in another cave room.

Merritt and the girl stared at three burros huddled in a far corner of the room. Long ropes were fastened around their necks, and attached to rings set in the rock walls. The animals moved restlessly as they approached.

"So you see!" the magician exclaimed, "there are your fellow conspirators! Beasts of burden—even as you shall be beasts!"

Merritt stared at the animals, then back to the magician.

"You're trying to tell me that these three beasts were once men? Preposterous!"

The magician lifted his head and laughed in his high-pitched voice.

"So! You do not believe! Well watch then, fool! Watch as I change them back into men!"

With the words the magician lifted his arms and his eyes closed. Again Merritt witnessed the weird phenomenon of the leaping wall fires. And once again he saw the cloudy mist appear as the magician's hands beckoned. And then the three burros were wrapped in the mist, away from their sight.

There was a bleating of sound from the throats of the animals, and then abruptly the sounds died away. And with them, the mist faded.

"Good heavens! Sharon—look! . . ."

Merritt's voice was an awed choking gasp. For he was staring not at three burros—but at three men!

They sat huddled on the floor, their eyes glazed, their bodies trembling. And over the scene came the mad laughter of the magician.

"You see! They are men—now! And they shall be beasts again—always!"

Merritt stared at the three men. One of them was clambering to his knees, feeling his body, his eyes wild with fear. A choking cry burst from the man's lips.

"You fiend! Stay away from us—stay away!"

The words were a sob of fear and it sent a shiver up Merritt's back. The terrible power of this madman came to him in a wave of startling horror. So it was true! Just as Bramm had intimated!

And then sudden hope came to Merritt. Now was the time to act. While the three agents were still men!

He saw in a flash that the men were free, even the restraining ropes had vanished. He shouted at them.

"You're free! Do you understand—you're free!"

As the words left his lips a dawning comprehension showed in the three men's eyes. And as Merritt whirled toward the magician, the three men suddenly clambered to their feet.

Even as Merritt started toward the magician, the man stepped back in sudden fear.

Merritt knew he wouldn't have time to use his weird powers. One more step and he'd smash his fist into that mad face. One more step.

"Stand still! I'll shoot you, Merritt!"

MERRITT halted a few inches from the magician. He wheeled savagely and found himself staring into Bramm's cold eyes. Beside Bramm, Torelli was moving forward, another gun trained at them.

"I thought something like this might happen," Bramm said coldly. His eyes turned angrily to the magician.

"Aladdin, I told you what to do—now you see what they nearly did?"

Aladdin's eyes were wild. "They didn't believe me!" he cried childishly. "They didn't believe I could turn them

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

into beasts! I was showing them—"

"And they nearly overpowered you," Bramm said. "But fortunately I got here in time." He motioned toward the three federal agents, standing uncertainly. "Change them back, Aladdin. Now!"

The magician bobbed his head in wild agreement. And Merritt felt a sickening feeling grasp him as he realized that his chance was gone. For one small second there had been hope. Now. . . .

There was a loud cry from the three men as the magician's arms raised and pointed at them. Their faces lit up with the dancing radiation that leaped from the walls of the cave, and then the mist appeared, whirling, hiding them from view.

Merritt watched, knowing what would happen. He saw the mist fade away, and then he saw the three animals, ropes around their necks, tied to the wall rings.

"All right, Merritt, and you too, Miss Kingsley, the show's over. Now we'll go back to your cell—and this time you'll stay there!"

Merritt gazed at Bramm's triumphant eyes, and under the watchful guns of Bramm and Torelli, he followed behind the girl as they walked back through the passage they had come through.

Back in the other cave room, Bramm herded them into their cell. Then he turned to Aladdin.

"This time you'll come along with me, Aladdin. We'll give them no more opportunity to trick you. . . . But first, Miss Kingsley will do us the honor of writing a letter."

The girl stared at Bramm. "A letter? To whom?"

Bramm smiled at her. "To your father, Miss Kingsley. To the head of the Crandon Atomic Research Institute. You'll tell him that you are safe and unharmed, but that he must come at once. You'll tell him to meet my agent outside the Crandon limits, and that if he does not come alone, or if he attempts to call the police, you will suffer the consequences."

The girl's eyes were wide with astonishment. "My father? Come here? Never!"

Bramm smiled coldly. "Shall I have Aladdin perform his little feat on you and Merritt right now? Or perhaps you would prefer to have Fred apply a little persuasion of his own. . . ."

THERE was no mistaking the deadly intent in the man's eyes. Merritt could see it. And his mind moved swiftly. If they refused to do as Bramm said, there could be only one conclusion. They would be killed—or worse than killed, changed into beasts like the three men in the other chamber. . . . But if the girl sent the letter, it would mean time for them. And it was also obvious that Bramm had a reason for wanting the scientist. Merritt knew suddenly that it was the only way open to them.

"Sharon," he said to the girl, "do as he says. It's our only chance. . . ."

Bramm laughed. "Good, Merritt. I'm glad to see that you realize the gravity of your position. Well, Miss Kingsley?"

The girl looked slowly at Merritt, her eyes filled with a hopeless dread.

"All right . . . I'll write the letter. . . ."

Bramm motioned to Torelli, and the gunman stepped forward, handing the girl a pen and paper.

Merritt stood watching as the girl slowly wrote the letter. Finally she finished and handed the paper to Torelli. The gunman gave it to Bramm, who carefully scanned it.

"That's fine, Miss Kingsley. I'm

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sure your father will be willing to co-operate. Now, back in your cell—both of you!"

Merritt and the girl moved into the stone chamber and as they turned to face the opening behind them they saw Bramm motion to the magician.

Aladdin stepped forward, his eyes wide, an insane laugh bubbling on his lips.

"Back behind the bars! Fools! No more will you trick me!"

And the magician raised his arms.

The radiant fires leaped from the walls, higher, higher. And with them came the mist, obscuring the doorway of the cell.

And when it faded the opening was sealed by the stone door with its barred window.

Merritt heard the footsteps recede slowly from the chamber, and when he looked out through the bars, there was no one there.

He turned wearily to the girl. Tears were flowing down her cheeks, and her body was trembling.

"Oh, Del! This is mad—*mad!*"

Merritt took the hysterical girl in his arms and lowered her gently to the floor of the cell. Then he sat down beside her and held her tenderly as she sobbed against his chest.

After a long while her sobs faded away and she slept.

But for Merritt there was no slumber. Only a terrible dread in his heart. They were living a nightmare, a nightmare of weird magic, of impossible horror. They would surely awake to find it was all a dream. . . . But he knew it wasn't a dream. And as he sat, his mind a leaden weight, a cold anger gnawed inside him. There must be a way. *There must be!*

MERRITT opened his eyes as the noise of the cell door clanged upon his ears. He realized that he had dozed off, and for how long he didn't know. The girl stirred in his arms and opened her eyes. Then Merritt looked up toward the cell door.

Dr. Martin Kingsley stood inside the door, staring at them.

The girl saw her father in the same instant.

"Dad! Oh, Dad!" she choked out and clambered to her feet.

The scientist stepped forward and took the girl into his arms, comforting her. Sharon Kingsley sobbed.

"You shouldn't have come. You shouldn't have come!"

Kingsley looked over at Merritt who had risen. "I saw Bramm," Kingsley announced. The girl stepped back from her father at the statement.

"Then you know about this place . . ." Merritt's voice trailed off.

The scientist nodded. "I've seen things that have rocked my very soul, Merritt. Things that I would have said were the wild imagination of some deluded mind. I saw the three Federal men. . . ."

Merritt's lips tightened. "So he showed you that too. Did he tell you why he had you brought here?"

The scientist shook his head. "No, he said that would come later . . . I suspected that something was drastically wrong when I received Sharon's note, but I had no idea. . . ."

Merritt sighed. "It looks like Bramm has everything just about stacked on his side. With that mad magician he calls Aladdin. . . ."

"Magician?" Kingsley rolled the word on his lips. "Yes, I suppose that's about as good as word as any to describe him. Certainly the forces his warped mind controls are beyond our scientific comprehension."

"They are more dangerous, doctor, than anything our science can pro-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

duce!" Merritt added.

As the words left his lips the door of the cell opened suddenly and the grinning face of Fred Torelli appeared.

"All right, folks, the boss wants to see all of you. Let's step lively—and no tricks." He waved a gun at them for emphasis.

They filed out of the cell silently and Torelli stepped back to bring up the rear as they walked through the passage connecting the main cavern chamber.

IN THE main chamber they saw a long table had appeared in the center of the floor. Chairs were arranged around the table, and a rich array of food was on top of it. At the head of the table Bramm sat, smiling as they approached. Standing behind him, Aladdin stood, his arm folded, his eyes staring at them.

"Ah, my guests have arrived. Good. You doctor, sit on my right. Merritt, beside the doctor, and you Miss Kingsley, on my left."

They sat down at the designated spots and waited. They could see Torelli move over behind Bramm to stand beside the magician.

"Well, come now, this is not a wake, let us eat heartily. Tonight we will celebrate!"

Sharon Kingsley looked scornfully at Bramm. "Celebrate? What do we have to celebrate?"

Bramm paused, a forkful of food on the way to his mouth. "But my dear," he said, "I have thus far spared your life—and your body still is yours to admire and will continue to be—as long as your illustrious father cooperates with my plan."

Merritt could see the girl shudder as the thought of the beast-men was driven into her again. Anger entered his voice as he faced Bramm.

"Just what sort of plan do you have in mind?"

"Patience, Merritt. All in good time." Then Bramm's eyes switched to each of them. "What is this, is nobody hungry?"

Kingsley cut in sharply. "You mentioned a plan *I* must cooperate in, I believe."

Bramm dropped his fork to the table with a clatter. He sat back in his chair.

"Very well, since you insist, we will get to the crux of the matter now.

"You are all aware of the magnificent forces at work in these caverns, forces controlled by the mind of Aladdin. You are also aware of the fact that the law considers people like myself—and Aladdin, as undesirables. That is something I intend to correct—for shortly, I shall be the law, and *my* word will rule —even as it does here!"

Merritt glanced significantly at Martin Kingsley. The scientist shrugged and they looked back to Bramm.

The movement had not escaped the big man. He laughed.

"So, you think I am talking madness? Well not for long, I assure you. Let me refresh your memory a bit as to what constitutes power. First of all there is fear. You have all seen what can be done to people who cross my path. It can be done to a great many more. That is my weapon of fear.

"Then there is money. Money can buy anything. With enough money a man can rule the world! And *I* have unlimited resources—watch!"

Bramm turned to the magician and pointed toward a huge section of rock rising from the floor against a far wall of the cavern.

"Show them, Aladdin, show them what rock can be made into!"

The magician unfolded his arms and strode swiftly across the room. Before the pile of rock he stopped, and as they watched, raised his hands over it.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Beyond him, the wall of the cavern shimmered as the radiance grew brighter. Tiny tongues of flame leaped into being until the entire wall seemed alive with the strange fire.

THEN out of the radiance a vast mist seemed to gather and obscure the rocks. The magician stood, his arms outspread as the mist thickened. Then he stepped back.

The radiance died down to a dull glow of phosphorescent light and the mist vanished. They stared with startled eyes at the rocks.

They were still there. But they no longer looked like rocks. They looked like—

"Gold!" Martin Kingsley breathed in an awed tone.

Bramm laughed. "Yes, doctor, *gold!* What you see there represents over a million dollars. And it is nothing! This entire hill can be converted into gold if I so choose! So you see the second point of power I control.

"Now the third, and what is the most important. Weapons. Where fear and money might fail, a devastating weapon succeeds. And what, doctor, is the most powerful weapon in the hands of man today?"

A stunning realization of what Bramm was leading up to shocked Merritt. As he looked at Kingsley and over to the girl, he could see that they had received the same thought. But none of them spoke.

"Atomic power!" Bramm shot the words out at them. "Yes, the power of the atom! Bombs that can destroy entire cities in one terrific explosion! That is to be my weapon, doctor—the weapon you will help Aladdin create!"

Kingsley shot up from his chair, his face white with wrath.

"Never! I would die first!"

Bramm looked at him coldly. "Sit down, doctor."

The scientist slowly sat down under the threatening gaze of Bramm. Then the big man sneered.

"A noble gesture, doctor, but unfortunately, not quite practical for my plans. You are one of the great atomic scientists, and you will show Aladdin what to create—not because of your own life, but because of your daughter!"

Kingsley's face froze into hard lines. "You wouldn't dare! She has nothing to do with this—"

"Wouldn't I?" Bramm laughed coldly. "Aladdin! Show the good doctor what his daughter will look like! Show him!"

Merritt shot from his chair but froze as Torelli raised his gun. Merritt stood helplessly watching as the mad magician walked slowly toward the girl. His eyes stared at her in a fiendish fascination, and slowly his arms began to rise.

The girl uttered a shriek of fear and her hands flew in front of her face. Then Kingsley's voice came hoarsely.

"Wait! I'll do what you ask! Don't let him harm her!"

Bramm's voice came sharply. "All right, Aladdin! Let the girl alone!"

The magician lowered his arms, his eyes holding a disappointed look in them. He backed slowly away from the girl.

Bramm turned to the scientist. "A wise decision, doctor. And remember, unless you fulfill your part of the bargain. . . ."

Kingsley nodded wearily. "I will."

Bramm smiled. "It shouldn't take you long. Aladdin needs only the facts with which to work. You and Merritt will work with him. Your daughter will return to her cell—safe."

Merritt looked questioningly at Bramm.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"And afterward?"

The big man shrugged. "Once the atomic weapon is in my hands I will send for others who will be glad to join me. Then I will move swiftly. But enough talk. Fred, you will take the young lady back to her cell. See that she is locked in safely. I will escort our other two guests to their new laboratory."

TORELLI moved forward and took the girl's arm roughly. She stared miserably at Merritt, and Merritt felt his heart ache at what he saw in her eyes. Then she was gone, and Bramm was motioning them toward another passageway.

The magician took the lead and they followed him through a circular winding tunnel, with branch passages working off in the direction of the chamber where the girl was being held, Merritt made a mental note of them as they walked on.

Finally they came to a large room, and Merritt's eyes gaped in astonishment as he saw a completely outfitted laboratory behind the steel door that opened as Aladdin turned the handle.

"As you see, doctor, we have been preparing for your work. If there is anything you lack, Aladdin will supply it for you."

Then the steel door closed behind them and Bramm's face peered in through the bars.

"I shall be back shortly. And remember, doctor, any attempts on your part to trick me will only result in your daughter's death—or worse!"

The face of Bramm vanished then and Merritt stared from Kingsley to the magician.

The magician was watching them expectantly. His eyes centered on the scientist.

"I am waiting, doctor. I shall show you how puny is your science! Only I can create! Only I am master of Misty Cave and the Great Power!"

Merritt was dimly aware that Kingsley had begun to speak, had begun, in a slow monotone of hopelessness, to explain what had to be done.

But Merritt was suddenly oblivious of it. His mind was racing.

He had been trying to find a weak point in Bramm's armor. Up until now there didn't seem to be any. Everything worked for, and not against the big man. But now, as Merritt stared at the magician, and the words of the madman repeated themselves in his brain, Merritt suddenly found it. The one thing that might be their salvation.

He broke in on Kingsley's words.

"Aladdin!"

The magician turned to him. Merritt took a deep breath, then:

"You said *you* were the master of Misty Cave! Why is it then that you are a slave to Bramm?"

The eyes of the magician went wide and he drew himself up haughtily.

"No man is my master! I am a slave to no one!"

Merritt's voice came smoothly. "Then look around you, Aladdin. The bars you hate—they are on the door. You are locked in! And even if you wanted to leave the cave if you escaped from here you couldn't! Bramm would not let you!

"And outside, Aladdin, there are many men waiting to take you back where you came from! You are locked in! The bars of this room! Bramm to hold you in his power, to use you as a tool for his own ends, and outside the cave, men to take you away!"

The magician's voice screamed suddenly.

"It is not true! It is a lie! *I* am the master of Misty Cave! *I* am free!"

Merritt laughed at him. "See how

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

free you are! Try and leave! Try and refuse to do Bramm's wishes!"

THE magician was backing away from Merritt, his eyes wide and wild. Suddenly, from outside the door of the room Torelli's voice came through the bars.

"What's going on in there!"

Merritt pointed to the door, his eyes glaring steadily at the magician.

"Now is your chance! See if I wasn't right! You can't escape—you are a prisoner as much as I am!"

Aladdin turned and ran to the door, his hands suddenly shaking.

"Let me out! I must see Bramm! Let me out!"

Torelli's voice snapped sharply. "Bramm gave you your orders! Get to work with Kingsley! You want to get the boss mad at you?"

The magician turned wildly toward Merritt, and Merritt laughed harshly.

"You see? It's just as I told you! You are behind bars—Misty Cave is your tomb from which you can never leave!"

Aladdin uttered a loud cry of fear. "No! I will not be locked in! *They* locked me in—but I escaped! Bramm will not lock me in! I will not let him!"

He turned madly toward the door. His arms raised in a wild gesture, pointing.

Outside the door Torelli was cursing madly, and Merritt saw him raise his gun through the opening.

Then suddenly the door was obscured by a rolling wave of mist. And when the mist vanished, the door was no longer there.

Aladdin ran from the room, a sharp cry on his lips.

Merritt turned to the scientist. "Quick! We've got to get out of here!"

Then he ran to the open doorway. He was in time to see Torelli staggering to his feet from the floor. The gunman was rubbing his eyes, half dazed.

As Merritt appeared in the doorway, Torelli raised his gun hand. Then Merritt had reached him. His foot came up in a sharp blow that caught Torelli under the jaw. The gunman collapsed to the floor with a grunt of pain.

"We've got to get Sharon!" Kingsley shouted as he came up beside Merritt.

The geologist nodded grimly, and pointed to a side passageway.

Then the two men were running, their feet echoing in the rocky passage, the dull glow of the walls shimmering around them.

Moments later they entered the chamber of the cell and Merritt let out a cry of exultation as he saw the girl staring wide-eyed at them behind the stone cell door.

"Del! Dad! You've escaped!"

Merritt ran forward and twisted the door of the cell. It swung outward, then, and the girl was suddenly in his arms.

Merritt forced himself to release her. He turned to the scientist.

"Doctor, there are still three men trapped here—"

Kingsley's voice interrupted him. "You mean the Federal men! But they're—"

"Beasts! Yes, I know, but they deserve a chance—we've got to help them!"

Kingsley nodded. "There isn't much time. Any moment Bramm will be after us . . ."

Merritt agreed. "But we have to take that chance!"

THEY turned then and ran down the connecting passageway that led to the chamber where the Federal men were held captive in their animal bodies. As they dashed into the room, the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

three burros were on their feet, plaintive sounds rising in their throats.

Merritt tore at the ropes that held the beasts, and finally they parted from the rings in the rock walls.

And as the rings parted, the flames on the walls increased suddenly. And with the radiance came a strange sound. It was a rising whine, that rose slowly, steadily.

And then a loud report came from behind them.

Merritt turned as the girl screamed a warning. He saw Torelli stagger into the chamber, blood flowing from a cut on his jaw, his eyes aflame with anger, his gun pointing at them.

As the gun went off again, Merritt felt himself suddenly flung to the floor of the cavern. The three beasts leaped over his body and into the path of the bullets. The gun roared and the air was filled with the sound.

Then Merritt was on his knees, preparing to leap at Torelli. But he was too late. Two of the beasts were on the floor, kicking their life away as blood poured from ragged holes in their bodies. The third had reached the gunman and its teeth fastened on Torelli's throat.

The killer screamed in terror and his gun came up alongside the burro's body. The gun roared again. Then Torelli's voice faded into a gurgling sound.

It had happened fast. Almost too fast for Merritt to realize it. He stared in awe as the body of Torelli suddenly lay still, and the third burro on top of it.

And then the strange sound grew in the cavern. The walls shimmered more brightly, and the floor beneath Merritt's feet trembled.

Sharon Kingsley's voice came in a hoarse cry.

"Del! Look—they're *changing!*"

Merritt looked to where the girl was pointing.

His eyes stared at the three animal forms on the floor. A faint mist seemed to envelope their bodies, and before his eyes they were changing. It was as if a cosmic hand were molding them, reshaping them—into men.

Kingsley knelt swiftly beside the men, and then rose, his eyes hopeless.

"We can't help them any more . . ."

Merritt felt a grimness in his heart. He knew that if it hadn't been for the three tortured animal-men Torelli's bullets would have reached him.

But his thoughts were torn from the tragedy by a violent shaking of the walls of the cavern.

"We've got to get out of here! Something's happening! Aladdin and Bramm . . ."

The scientist nodded agreement and turned to the passageway. Merritt took the girl's arm and they sped through the rocky hall, past the cell chamber, and finally, as they approached the main cavern, Merritt pulled them up short.

The sound had grown in volume. It was a roar of sound, an overwhelming hum of weird vibration. And the air was charged with the leaping radiation. It grew in intensity until it was almost a palpable thing.

AND then Merritt's eyes took in the huge cavern room. A chill swept through him as he saw the magician standing near the far wall, Bramm rushing upon him.

The magician's arms were spread upward and his voice was screaming.

"Misty Cave is mine! I alone am the master! *They* will never get me! I will never go behind their bars—*never!*"

And Merritt heard Bramm shout in rage.

"You fool! You'll kill all of us! The radiation is out of control!"

"Kill! Kill!" Aladdin screamed.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"We will all die! Then we will be free! They will never get us then! *We will all die!*"

As Merritt watched, awe-struck, he saw Bramm reach the magician. The big man's arms shoved the magician back, knocking him to the floor.

There was a loud cry from Aladdin and then one arm pointed at Bramm as the big man hurtled on his prostrate body.

In mid-air the big man stopped. A wall of radiation swept between the two men and threw Bramm backward. Then the magician was on his knees, screaming again.

"We will all die! Do you hear? We will all die!"

His arms raised higher, and even at a distance Merritt could see the mad eyes of the turbaned man.

And then the walls of the cavern began to tremble. A great crack appeared and a shower of glowing rock fell with a crash to the floor of the chamber.

Merritt grabbed the hand of Sharon Kingsley and shouted above the roar.

"We've got to get out of here! Run for the cave entrance!"

Even as the words left his lips he pulled the girl after him, and the scientist ran swiftly beside them.

Across the carpeted floor of the chamber they ran.

And as they neared the entrance to the cavern, Merritt saw Bramm struggling wildly to his feet. The big man's face was a mask of rage and fear. He was backing against the wall close to the magician. And then suddenly the flames leaped out from the wall and enveloped the big man's body.

There was a roar of sound, and then a shriek of utter terror. Merritt saw the big man's body burst into flame as the radiation swept from the walls in a wave of flooding brilliance.

Then the narrow passageway closed around them and as they raced through it there came a thundering explosion from behind them.

The floor of the passageway rocked and swayed beneath their feet. Beside them, Merritt felt the girl cry out in terror. He breathed a prayer and gripped the girl firmly as he ran.

Then suddenly they were outside and the cool night of the gorge whipped around them.

Even as Merritt breathed a prayer of thanks, there was a terrible crashing sound in their rear. Merritt turned his head as they staggered through the night and saw the entrance to the cavern collapse in a shower of crushing rock. And as the cave opening vanished, a great rumbling of sound shattered the air.

The wall of the rocky gorge seemed to split with a shriek of sound. And then tons of rock and earth slid into the opening sending up a cloud of smoke.

They stopped running and turned to watch the cataclysm. It was as if a mighty hand had closed over the gorge and was crushing the rock walls in a herculean frenzy.

A wave of radiation swept through the fissure and shot skyward. Then, as the earth closed over the great crevice, the radiation faded. Finally it was gone.

And as they stood, their breath coming in short gasps, a silence fell. A silence that was broken only by the gentle whisper of the night wind.

It was then that the girl fell sobbing in Merritt's arms.

DR. MARTIN KINGSLEY closed the door of his private office and walked slowly back to his desk. There was a grimness around his mouth as he faced Del Merritt and his daughter.

"I've just checked in our laboratory.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The radiation has vanished."

Merritt sighed. "Then the danger is over, doctor. —But what about our report?"

The scientist stared at him. "Report? Can we say that we found a cavern ruled by a madman? Can we say that there were forces under his control—the very forces of creation? Can we tell the truth?"

Merritt shook his head slowly. "No, doctor, we can't. Nobody will believe —the truth."

"Exactly. What happened in Misty Cave will have to remain our secret. We can just thank God that we escaped with our lives."

Sharon Kingsley shuddered. "I can't believe it all happened. Just a few short hours ago . . . and those poor men . . ."

Merritt reached over and took her hand. "They had a job to do, Sharon. They were sent to get Bramm. They died fighting—and they got their man."

Kingsley nodded. "We can't even tell the government that. The case of Bramm will be closed unsolved. The public will never know."

The girl's eyes lowered. "It's better that way. Only we three will know the true story. . . . And maybe even we can forget it in time . . ."

Merritt's hand tightened on hers and his eyes found hers tenderly.

"We will forget it. We'll build a new life, far away from here—together."

Her lips answered in a soft whisper. "Yes, Del,—together."

THE END

Strange Creatures Of The Deep

★ By H. R. Stanton ★

DEEP in the ocean there is total darkness, for the sun cannot penetrate to great depths. But the fish at such levels have devised ways of finding their way about. Some have furnished themselves with brilliant head and tail lights, and some have rows of lights along their sides and look like portholes of a ship at night. Some have gadgets that resemble lanterns that dangle from the tips of long tentacles. The fish that show no light and are blind have developed very sensitive tentacles, many times the length of their bodies, and with these they feel their way through life.

At great depths, there is no sea weed, so the fish must feed upon each other. They are always hungry and are ready to attack any edible creature that happens along. Some fish have such long teeth that they can't close their mouths. Others have hinged teeth that catch and hold their prey till it slides down their throats. Sometimes their set of teeth is illuminated, and you can imagine the nightmares they cause their fleeing victims to have. There are black wriggly eels with mouths many times the size of their bodies, and there is the black swallower who looks like an ordinary fish except its stomach is so rubbery that it can swallow and digest a fish many times its own size.

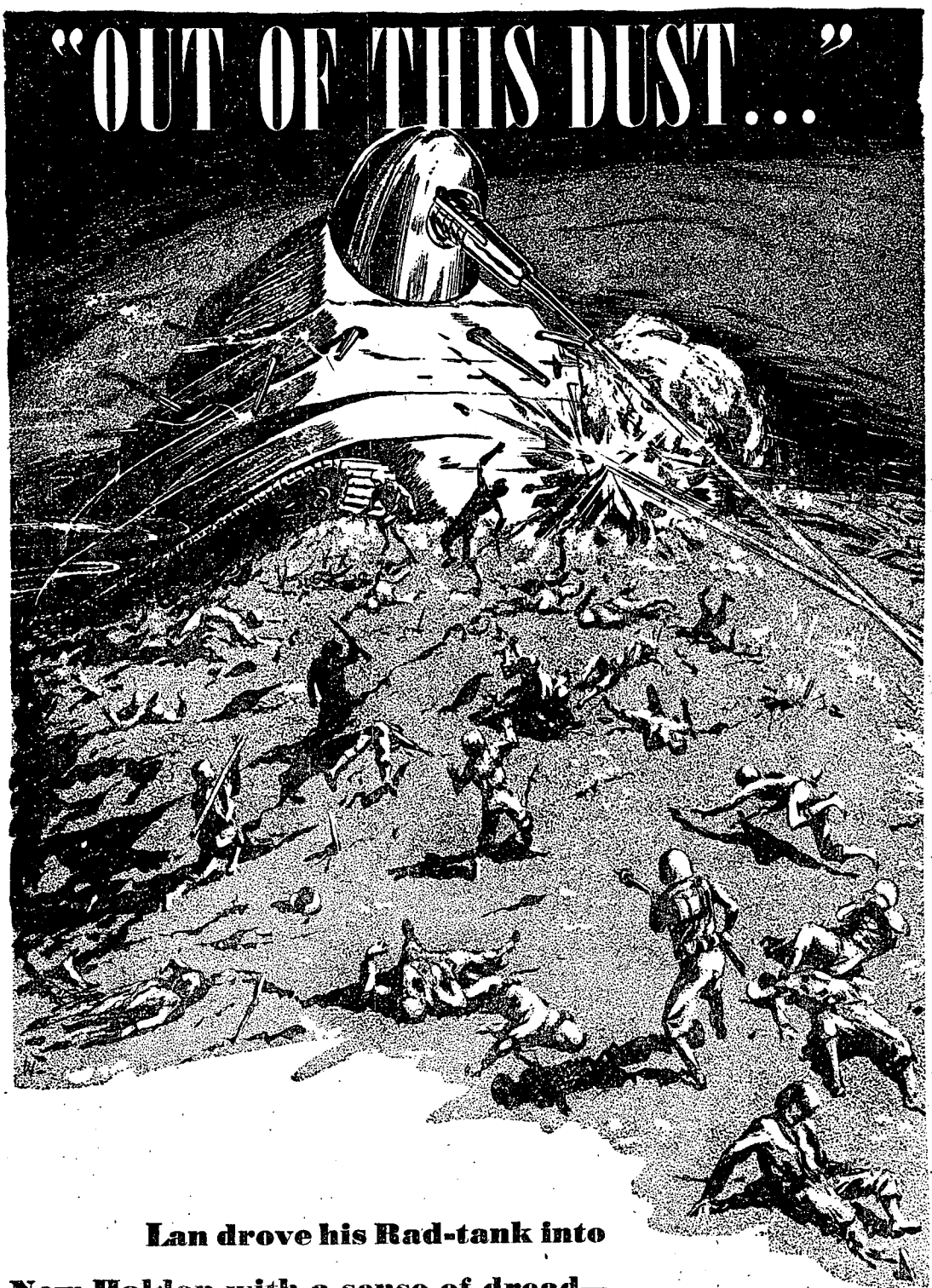
Fish have to have ways of defending themselves and ways of covering up their escape or there would be no more fish. Some fish can turn off their lights at will or blink them to confuse their attacker. The large shrimp can throw about themselves a luminous fire-screen, which blinds their pursuer till they have time to escape. Other deep sea freaks can throw thorns and quills at their gourmands.

Many fish have no color and look as though they are made of clear glass. You can see their blood and heart working and can even see what they had for their last meal. The hatchet fish has rows of purple and green lights along its under side and its eyes are at the ends of short tubes that look like binoculars pointing straight upward.

The devil-angler fish have the strangest habits. The female grows to about three feet long and carries a luminous bait at the end of a tentacle. She is an ugly looking thing with her tough, black, spiny skin. The males are dwarfs, about two inches long. The only big thing about them is their nostrils. They have a keen sense of smell which directs them through the inky black waters in quest of a mate. When a male finds a female, he grabs on to her spiny skin where ever he happens to touch. There he sits till he grows fast and he never swims freely again. He soon starts to lose his sight, stomach, fins, and brain, even his big nostrils. He becomes a sort of parasite, and is probably the only deep sea fish who ever finds a place to sit down.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"OUT OF THIS DUST..."



Lan drove his Rad-tank into New Haldon with a sense of dread—would these people shun him too? . . .

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

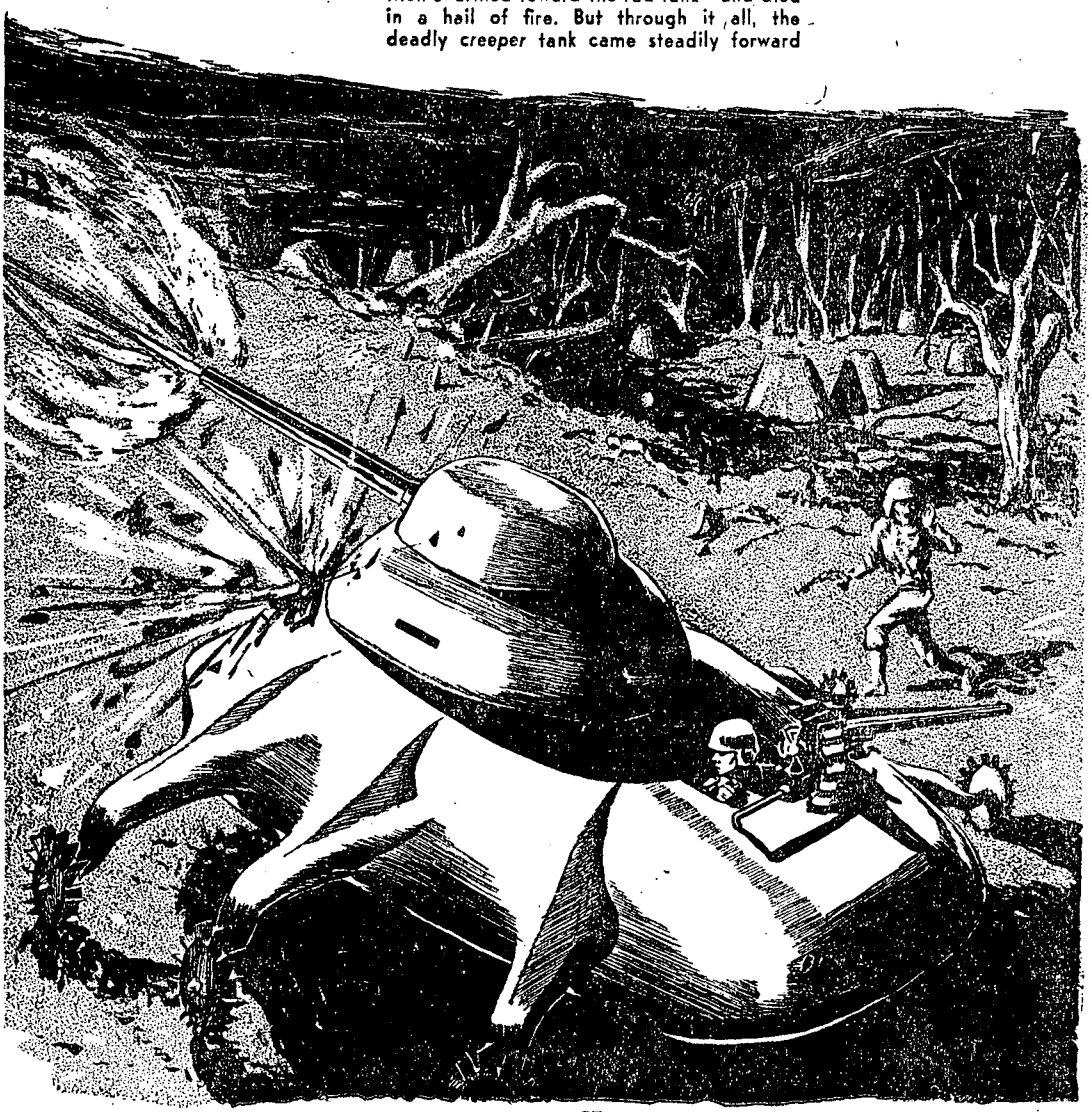
By Charles Recour

"WILL it always be like this?" The question emanated from Lan Thanson's tightly twisted lips, compressed in mingled anger and despair. It bounced off the dull aluminum walls of the interior of the Rad-tank and seemed to whisper back again to the grim youth.

"Will it always be like this?"

The rustle and slither of his lead-impregnated plastic coverall was the only other sound that mingled with the desperate words, as Lan peered once more through the quartz and plasti-glass slit that was the vision port of the radiation tank. Lan's gaze was riveted on the pastoral scene that confronted him.

Men swarmed toward the rad-tank—and died in a hail of fire. But through it all, the deadly *creeper* tank came steadily forward



PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The rubber-sheathed treads of the radiation tank rested squarely in the middle of a shining ribbon of concrete that ran through this hilly, wooded area. Lan felt for a moment as though he were in another world. Here was no mass of shattered rubble and twisted steel. Here was no stench of decaying flesh. Here, man's handiwork was recognizable only in the concrete roadway —and the sign . . .

The cause of Lan's preoccupation and despair stood almost on the side of the road. It was a neat metal sign—aluminum, Lan guessed—and it was neatly lettered.

"Warning," it said, in bold, black letters. Then: "Do not enter this area. This is the Free Community of New Haldon. We will not tolerate strange entry—whether radiation-free or contaminated. Observers failing to heed this notice will subject themselves to Military Action. This Free Community is fully militarized!"

Directly beneath this warning, the words were repeated in the language Lan had learned as well as his native English—Asiatican. Dully his eyes read the repetition.

His pondering was interrupted by another sound. The chirp of a bird. Lan ran his glove-sheathed hand over the stubble on his chin.

God, he thought, they *do* have a radiation-free community. Even animal life is reproducing.

For one brief moment the six years of the Atomic Wars disappeared and Lan was once more a human being instead of a soldier. He saw himself at school. The theoretical physics in which he was trained appeared as an academic exercise, not a training for a future war. Life was to be lived and enjoyed. Men were brothers.

The vision vanished and Lan heard the high shrill whine of the Pan-Asiatican rockets whining overhead, carrying their burdens of destruction to the cities of the world. Simultaneously with their detection, the answer was given, and but a few moments later, the cities of Pan-Asiatica flared brilliant beneath the exploding of atomic bombs, even as North Americans—those that were left—were viewing the ruins of their own cities.

Then had come the invasion and counter-invasion of Asiatica and North America. Armies destroyed each other and died in the products of their own lethal radiation-producing bombs and torpedoes. The technologists of both forces gradually disintegrated until the sight of a rocket overhead was a rarity. Still enough buried cities and factories, hidden in the closest isolation, managed to produce the deadly implements of modern war.

Finally, even these identities were merged with death and destruction as highly-skilled, completely mobile bands of radiation soldiers tracked down the production lairs of each other—and destroyed them. Now the Earth, Europa, Pan-Asiatica, North America, South America, Austro-Con—all were peculiar areas of death, laden with the destructive seeds of radiation products, livable only in spots. Men were few and far between and communities almost non-existent.

Lan's military unit ended as such when in a furious battle with Pan-Asiatic patrols, it was destroyed along with them. Lan was the single survivor, untouched by radiation. Pure chance had protected him.

BITTERLY, as these thoughts meandered through Lan's mind, his eyes fell on the stained nameplate on the instrument panel. What had happened to the city which had forged this Rad-tank? The words, "Im Essen fabri-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ziert," were distinguishable. That city, too, was quietly settling into rust and ruin, Lan was sure.

Lan flipped the transparent helmet over his head, checked the magazines of his machine pistol and his sub-machine gun, opened the hatch of the tank and stepped out.

He hadn't been out of the tank for two days, and the air that came through his filter tasted particularly good. He glanced cautiously around and stepped into the shelter of the woods. He kept his eyes on his radiation tank. It was his home, his shelter, his only hope of survival in this weird unnatural world.

For ten minutes, Lan debated what to do—as if any debate was necessary. He knew there was only one answer. He would turn the tank around and leave, hoping against hope that there would be some other community in which the fires of hatred and war had died down sufficiently for it to accept a stranger. Lan wanted to be among his own kind. If he tried to enter this community, he knew he would be burned out instantly.

Reluctantly, he slid his lean body back into the pilot seat of the radiation tank. He flipped the switch marked *Zündung—Ignition*—and there was the soft hiss of burning fuel. The rapid-heating high pressure boiler came up to temperature and the tank was ready to roll.

Slowly Lan wheeled it in the direction from which he had come.

"So long, New Haldon," he said softly, and there was no bitterness in his voice, only an infinite sorrow.

The tank rolled along the ribbon of concrete for a number of miles. Then Lan drove it off the road into the dense forest thickets. He stopped the engine. A plan had come to him. He was determined to encounter his own kind. Besides, he felt the need for a bath and knowing the area was radiation-free, he could safely take one in the nearest stream.

He checked with the Geiger-Miller. It was clicking slowly and casually—ordinary cosmic stuff. There was nothing harmful here.

Re-arming himself, and in addition, taking a few grenades, Lan left the tank once more. He made sure it was sufficiently hidden. Then he strode into the woods.

Here was no evidence of "man's inhumanity to man." Instead, all was peace and quiet. Occasionally bird-sounds could be heard. Sunlight filtering through tree-tops cast beautiful patterns of light and shade. It was a world which missed nothing but human companionship. The greatest loss of all, Lan knew.

As he stepped through a plot of underbrush he found himself suddenly on the bank of a small stream. Its pure crystalline water sparkled, and it flowed rapidly enough to gurgle. Lan smiled at the small sounds.

His Geiger-Miller showed no variation in radiation intensity. It was safe. Making sure that he could not be seen any great distance, Lan rapidly stripped to the skin. In a minute he had plunged into the stream.

The water was cold, and his dirty body, overheated in the compactness of his radiation suit, shivered at the outrage.

Making as little noise as was possible and using his one remaining bar of soap salvaged from some burnt-out kit, Lan thoroughly scrubbed himself, wallowing in the luxury of being free of his armaments for the while. He wasted no time.

As soon as he could, he reclothed himself, only then feeling secure. With no definite purpose in mind, he decided to follow the course of the stream for a way.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Noting that it was well into the afternoon, he knew it would not be wise to spend too much time here. And there was always the possibility that someone might discover the Rad-tank.

Stepping through a tangle of dense foliage, Lan stopped suddenly. Wearing little more than a colorful plastic tunic and with her feet dangling in the cool waters of the stream, a girl sat on the bank reading a book. She was completely immersed in her reading, and Lan hastily stepped back, concealing himself.

THE idiocy of the scene made him want to laugh aloud. As if she had no worries whatsoever on her mind, the girl sat calmly, enjoying herself. Lan felt the pangs of envy. His heart quickened at the sight of her beauty. The longer he looked the more impressed he was. She was no more than twenty, her skin a lovely tawny golden, her hair a brilliant yellow. She was such a woman as he had not seen in years.

This girl had never been singed by the fiery products of radiation. Her book, her brief clothing, the sandal-like shoes at her side, and the small holstered pistol testified to the fact that she came from a still competent cultural group. Perhaps she was a member of the New Haldon community.

Lan rejected the idea. She would certainly not be left as unguarded as this. He wanted to approach her, yet he dared not. She would either cry out in alarm or give some warning. Possibly she would even attempt to kill him, in which case he would be forced to kill her, and that he didn't want to do. Beauty was too rare in Lan's life for him to want to destroy any part of it. So he waited and watched. Occasionally she shifted her position, her movements a fluid grace, and Lan's heart beat faster with a strange desire. Still he waited and watched. An hour passed.

Abruptly the girl put down the book, marking her place with a leaf. Lan smiled at the gesture. Once he had done the same—a million years ago. She reached up, stretched, and yawned, and the muscular effort did things to pronounce her figure.

The girl stood up, strapping the holstered weapon around her waist. She picked up the book and started along the stream away from Lan. Lan followed her, always keeping sufficiently behind to avoid detection. Once she turned and for a moment Lan thought she knew she was being followed. She stopped, a puzzled frown on her face. She shook her head as if to banish an unpleasant thought and then proceeded on her way.

A half hour's walk brought her to a twisted mass of concrete and steel. Lan recognized it as the remnants of a town. Hardly a single wall was left standing. Rust and ruin were everywhere and already the forest and grasses had started to encroach on the ruins.

Here and there the torn and twisted framework of an aircraft or a rocket shell could be seen. The girl seemed to know her way around, for she threaded through the ruins with confidence. Lan followed, every now and then glancing at his Geiger-Miller to assure himself of radiation freedom.

The girl seemed to have no purpose in mind. She paused in the middle of the ruined town and gazed about. An expression of pity and sadness crossed her face. Somehow Lan felt glad.

Lan dropped quickly to the ground. Forty feet away from the girl and behind her to one side, Lan detected motion. He watched carefully. Something was moving. He wanted to cry out but he dared not for fear he'd throw the girl into a panic. He remained silent,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

but he released the safety on the sub-machine gun.

The girl sat down on a rock, completely unaware that anything was happening.

Into Lan's gaze, there slowly and cautiously came a figure, a figure which Lan hadn't seen alive for a long time. It was a powerfully built Asiatican soldier, clad much as Lan was in radiation-gas-proof suit, armed in much the same manner and from his movements, as confident that he was alone with the girl, as Lan had been a few minutes before.

The soldier gingerly stepped through the rubble covered ground, careful to make no sound. Slowly he crept upon the girl. He had observed her pistol, for he kept an automatic rifle at the ready.

Anxiously Lan looked around for companions. There were none that he could see. Still, it was unlikely that the Asiatican was alone.

LAN brought his sub-machine gun to his shoulder and put the sights on the Asiatican's back. Once again he was about to be the executioner and the thought did not appeal to him. The war had been too devastating for him to retain any hatred of an Asiatican as such. Now he only thought of him as a menace to the girl.

The Asiatican was not twelve feet from the girl when she turned and saw him. Her mouth opened in surprise. At the same instant she reached for the holstered pistol. And like a flash the Asiatican leaped toward her.

The flat crack of Lan's gun was drowned by the roar of the exploding bullet. The Asiatican's upper half vanished in a flare of bursting flesh and rending flame.

The girl, blown off her feet by the explosion, retained her presence of mind. Like a cat she was back on her feet, this time the pistol in her hand.

She leveled it at Lan, who walked slowly toward her, his sub-machine gun hanging from his right arm. He stopped ten feet from her.

"I'm Radiation Officer Lan Thanson," he said slowly, marveling at the sound of his own voice, "formerly commanding an offense unit—now dead and dispersed. I am radiation-free." He pointed to the counter strapped to his side.

The girl's suspicious look relaxed very slightly. She kept the pistol pointed at him.

"I'm Seryl Crane," she said simply, "a New Haldonite. New Haldon is—"

"I know," Lan interrupted her, "I saw your welcome sign," he said wryly.

"I'm sorry," she said, "but you know how difficult it is."

"I know," Lan said again, "the wars have changed people . . ."

"We can't help it. Do you want us to take in every stray? How can a community revive, if it expands beyond its limits? We're only beginning."

"Of course it can't. But there's no use talking about it. Get back to your community. I'm going back to my Rad-tank. There are probably more of these things around." He touched the remains of the Asiatican with his toe.

"Yes," she said, "I suppose I should go." Lan detected a pitying note in her voice, and it irritated him. Then suddenly he stiffened.

"Get down, Seryl. Down!"

The girl dropped beside him at the warning. Lan motioned for silence, and pointed.

Figures were moving in the nearby woods.

"They probably heard the shot," he whispered. He paused. "I have a suggestion," he added, "but you don't have to take it."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She looked at him, her eyes seeking to fathom his. "Yes?"

"I'm going back to the Rad-tank. It's the only safe spot around here. You can come with me if you want to."

She hesitated for a moment. Then she said:

"All right. I will go with you. I think I can trust you . . ."

He hadn't wondered at her apparent lack of gratitude. He was too familiar with the fact that she had assumed he had saved her for one reason—for himself.

Crawling through the ruins on their bellies they made almost invisible objects and it was not long before they reached the sanctuary of the woods and located the stream which they would have to follow back to the Rad-tank.

As soon as they were surrounded by sufficient foliage, they stood erect and Lan urged her to follow him as fast as she could.

WHEN they reached the spot where the Rad-tank stood, Lan paused and surveyed the situation. They could see the Rad-tank still well hidden and apparently undisturbed.

Seryl nudged Lan. "Look!" she warned. On the opposite side of the Rad-tank were three Asiaticans, fully armed and armored. They were talking among themselves much as if they were awaiting someone.

Lan's nerves were tense. This was not going to be easy. At all costs they must get into the Rad-tank. If they didn't, there was almost no hope of evading the Asiaticans or standing up to them.

He looked at the girl. The hesitation which had marked her original distrust was gone. Instead, she was looking at him with a hopeful smile.

Confidence surged back into Lan. He knew what he had to do now. He could see the three heads over the top of the tank, still engaged in conversation.

"Come," he whispered to Seryl, "we'll get them from the other side where we can't miss. Are you afraid?"

"No," she said simply. "I'm not afraid at all, Rad-off Thanson."

Lan smiled at her use of his military title. It had been a long time since anyone had addressed him that way.

Moving slowly, they worked their way around to the other side of the Rad-tank. Never before did its battle-scarred bulk look more attractive. Did the armorers in Essen who had forged it so long ago, ever think that it would serve a purpose here, Lan wondered?

The forty millimeter gun protruding from the top turret looked ominous and menacing. The terrible explosive shells it shot could wreak havoc anywhere.

Once on the other side of the tank, Lan looked at Seryl as he brought up the muzzle of his sub-machine gun. She turned her head away. Familiarly, Lan's finger set the catch to "automatic."

He pressed the trigger.

A half-dozen shots sped into the group of Asiaticans. Accuracy was not necessary. The three men never knew what happened. They simply disintegrated into torn masses of bone and flesh as the explosive bullets shredded them in coruscant blasts of flame and force.

At his side, Lan felt the girl shudder. He looked down at the weapon in his hand. How many men had it destroyed? He dared not think about it.

"All right," he said, "let's get into the tank."

In a matter of a minute they were esconced safely behind its explosive and radiation-proof walls.

"I'll drive, Seryl," Lan said. "Do you want to sit in the turret?"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"We may need this gun, Lan," Seryl said determinedly. "I might as well learn to use it."

Lan quickly explained its mechanism. There was nothing to do except sight it, and even then explosive shells did most of the work.

THE Rad-tank moved smoothly and rapidly along the concrete ribbon toward the sign that had so annoyed Lan.

"Has New Haldon any weapons to match this?" he asked.

"We have plenty of rocket equipment" Seryl said, "ground stuff, that is, but deadly. We haven't had to use it yet, but I'm sure we can fight off the average attacker."

"That's good," Lan agreed, "because I think there are more of those devils, and I don't like it at all. They must have set up some sort of central agency for Asiaticans. By now most of them should be broken up into bands as little as ours."

Seryl explained the social organization of New Haldon, of which Lan already had a good idea. It was a hopeful sign that such communities were springing up everywhere. The only unfavorable thing about it, he thought, was the fact that the communities almost always regarded any stranger as an enemy. The Wars had done that to people.

"Will it ever stop?" Seryl mused aloud.

"There is hope," Lan said. "Especially when it is possible to see a beautiful girl reading a book by a stream . . ."

Seryl blushed.

"What were you reading?" Lan asked, his hands automatically manipulating the Rad-tank controls.

"It—it was a love story," she finally admitted, the blush deepening her tan.

Lan didn't laugh; "I understand that," he said simply, "I know."

How long had he stayed away from books of all kinds, much less love stories? It was a reassuring thing to know that human beings still believed in the fundamentals and took pleasure in the simple, common things.

Lan forced his mind to return to the immediacy of the situation. The tank rolled powerfully along the concrete roadway and when they passed the sign, Lan suddenly jammed on the brakes. There was the harsh screech as the vehicle ground to a halt. Along the road in front of them squatted dozens of Asiaticans, in all states of preparation for war. Weapons were being cleaned, radiation suits were being checked, commands were being given. It was a military camp preparing for the march.

To one side of the road lay a half dozen bodies. "New Haldonites," Seryl said, and there was a bitterness in her voice.

Lan reacted rapidly.

"Fire!" he shouted to Seryl while his own side guns started to chatter their refrain of death.

The startled Asiaticans scattered in a vain effort to escape the rain of fire sweeping down on them. It was hopeless. Some got away as was inevitable, but the majority were suddenly in the midst of exploding forty millimeter shells.

In ones and twos, in fours and fives, the groups of Asiaticans were wiped out—all of those who were unable to seek the shelter of the woods. They fired back, but their miniature rockets, their modest gunfire, was no match for the Rad-tank. And Lan swept the tank up and down the road while, from above, Seryl sprayed the surrounding forest with explosive charges. Those Asiaticans who had lingered to fire at the tank were mercilessly squashed.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

IN THE space of five minutes two hundred men perished. The slaughter was sickening to Lan. Yet he was helpless. He had to do it. It was as primitive as the ancient law of the jungle. Kill or be killed. The voice of war inside him commanded and he did his duty.

When it was finally over, Lan heard the girl crying softly.

"Lan," she said, "I've never killed a man before . . ."

He waited, a numbness crushing his heart, until her hysteria quieted down. Then:

"Do your people have patrols?" he asked her.

"Yes," she replied. "I'm sure they know about the Asiaticans by now. If nothing else, they've heard the gunfire."

"If that's so why isn't something being done about the presence of the Asiaticans?"

"I don't know. There must be some reason. Perhaps it's a trap of some kind. We went through the Wars too, you know."

"I'm sorry," he said, "it's just that I don't want to see New Haldon wiped out by a horde like this."

"You won't, Lan," the girl said. "New Haldonites aren't exactly fools."

Lan continued to drive the Rad-tank up the now darkening strip of highway. A searchlight on the front supplied sufficient illumination, and also afforded an excellent opportunity for target practice for the few Asiaticans who were still sniping sporadically. Their explosive bullets did no harm to the invulnerable sides of the Rad-tank, but occasionally, Seryl would evince anxiety as the *spanging* sound came too close.

After a time, Lan turned off the searchlight and proceeded in darkness. The tank made a turn in the road and then Lan brought it to an abrupt stop.

"What's that?" he asked tensely.

The girl peered through the gloom to a half-cleared forested area to one side of the road. Sticking up from the ground were a few squat concrete towers. To one side of the clearing a large metal cone stood. It was barely recognizable, for now it was a shattered mass of steel.

"Those are the air-intakes, the filters, and a guard tow—" her voice broke off in sudden alarm. "Lan!" she cried, "they've blasted the watch tower!"

A DOZEN shapes suddenly rushed across the clearing toward the air intakes. Lan could not see what they were carrying, but it was clear that they were going to flood the air-intakes with something lethal.

He threw the tank into action. Once more he was Rad-Off Thanson, war machine, at his duty station. The staccatto bark of the automatic forty-millimeter in Seryl's turret was music to his ears. The figures in front crumpled into shattered bits of pulpy matter as the explosive shells cut them up. Lan threw on the light once more. In its brilliant beam, a horde of racing Asiaticans tore over the ground toward the air-intakes.

Seryl's turret gun coughed a belching stream of death. The Asiaticans caught in the lethal stream died, and the living poured over the corpses until they too joined the dead.

Then it ceased. The dreadful carnage was over. Lan sighed with relief, while the girl above him was white-faced and shaken. Her lips were compressed in a thin line, horror etching her eyes.

A disturbing thought flitted through Lan's mind. Why hadn't the Asiatican's some sort of armor? In numbers as large as theirs surely they should have had sufficient skilled men to keep

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a vehicle or two operating . . . The thought had scarcely crossed his mind when he saw it.

It was a low-slung tractor-type, hardly different in appearance than a beetle. No more than four feet high it moved over the ground slowly. Seryl spotted it at the same instant.

"Lan!" she cried, "a Creeper!—They've got a Creeper!"

The little vehicle came on even as the girl poured a rain of fire on it.

Lan headed the Rad-tank straight for it in order to give the girl the best possible opportunity to place her shots against the ground-hugging craft.

Still it came, the hail of shells exploding harmlessly against its armor and merely bathing it in a coruscant sheet of fire. From its front protruded a muzzle, short and squat and deadly in suggestion.

As it fired—in that same instant—Lan saw its plating start to disintegrate under the flaring blasts of Seryl's explosive hail. And at the same time the Rad-tank lurched as the beetle's projectile caught it squarely on the bow.

Lan felt the savage force of the shock and even as he waited for the disintegrating explosion, he knew that the hand of death he had so long eluded was closing around him . . .

HE OPENED his eyes against the wet dewy grass. It felt cool and pleasant to his skin, and it told him he was alive.

As he raised his head he could see the battered, burnt-out hulk that had been the Rad-tank, and near it, the shattered *Creeper*.

Then he felt strong, but gentle arms pulling him to his feet. He staggered erect, dizziness sweeping over him, and saw strange, but kindly-faced people around him. And then he saw the girl.

"Seryl . . ."

"Lan—Lan! You're all right now! My people pulled us from the burning tank—the Asiaticans are destroyed . . ."

Lan nodded wearily, but felt a great gladness at the sound of the girl's voice.

Then one of the men had stepped up to him. Lan felt a firm hand placed gently on his shoulder.

"Rad-off Thanson, my daughter has told me of you while you were unconscious. But there was no need for that, all of my people thank you for what you have done to help us. I know not of your plans, but our community of New Haldon is open to you . . . we hope you will stay."

The man's voice faded away and then Lan felt soft arms around him. He looked into the shining eyes of the girl.

"Did you hear that, Lan? You have a home now."

Home! The word rolled through Lan's mind. He looked up at the shattered hulk of his Rad-tank. It had been his home for so long. A home where death waited, where he had always met it with screaming shells. He had traveled through a wretched world in that home . . .

He saw the smiling faces around him. Then he looked down into the girl's eyes. He saw there all the hope and promise he had dreamed of finding all his life. He saw a new life waiting there, a life he could help build instead of destroy. He saw hope there, hope for a war-shattered world.

"I will stay, Seryl," he said softly.

COMING NEXT MONTH:—

CITY OF SAND

By Berkeley Livingston

A great new dramatic novel of adventure in other worlds . . . Reserve your copy now! . . .

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Toffee Turns The Trick

by CHARLES F. MYERS

The *fixage* pills caused a major change in Marc's life—they not only made him a babe in arms—but Toffee's to boot!

THE strange valley, its glossy emerald carpet unruffled and unmarked, its scattered groves of odd, feathery trees undisturbed by the blue mists languishing at their feet, lay dozing in the diffused light of a sunless sky. Then, at the crest of a distant knoll, the mists suddenly stirred and gave way to a slender, gold-sandaled foot which was neatly attached to a really top-notch leg.

The leg swung gracefully into view and was instantly joined by various other notable appointments; another exquisite leg, for instance, a body of disquieting shapeliness and a pert young face. As an almost needless bonus there were also two vivid green eyes, a full red mouth and a plethora of gleaming titian hair. Together, these dazzling bits of merchandise added up to Toffee, blithe mistress of the valley of Marc Pillsworth's subconscious mind.

Certainly, Marc Pillsworth was not the first man to have a girl on his mind but at least he could claim the distinction of being the first to have one actually dwelling therein!

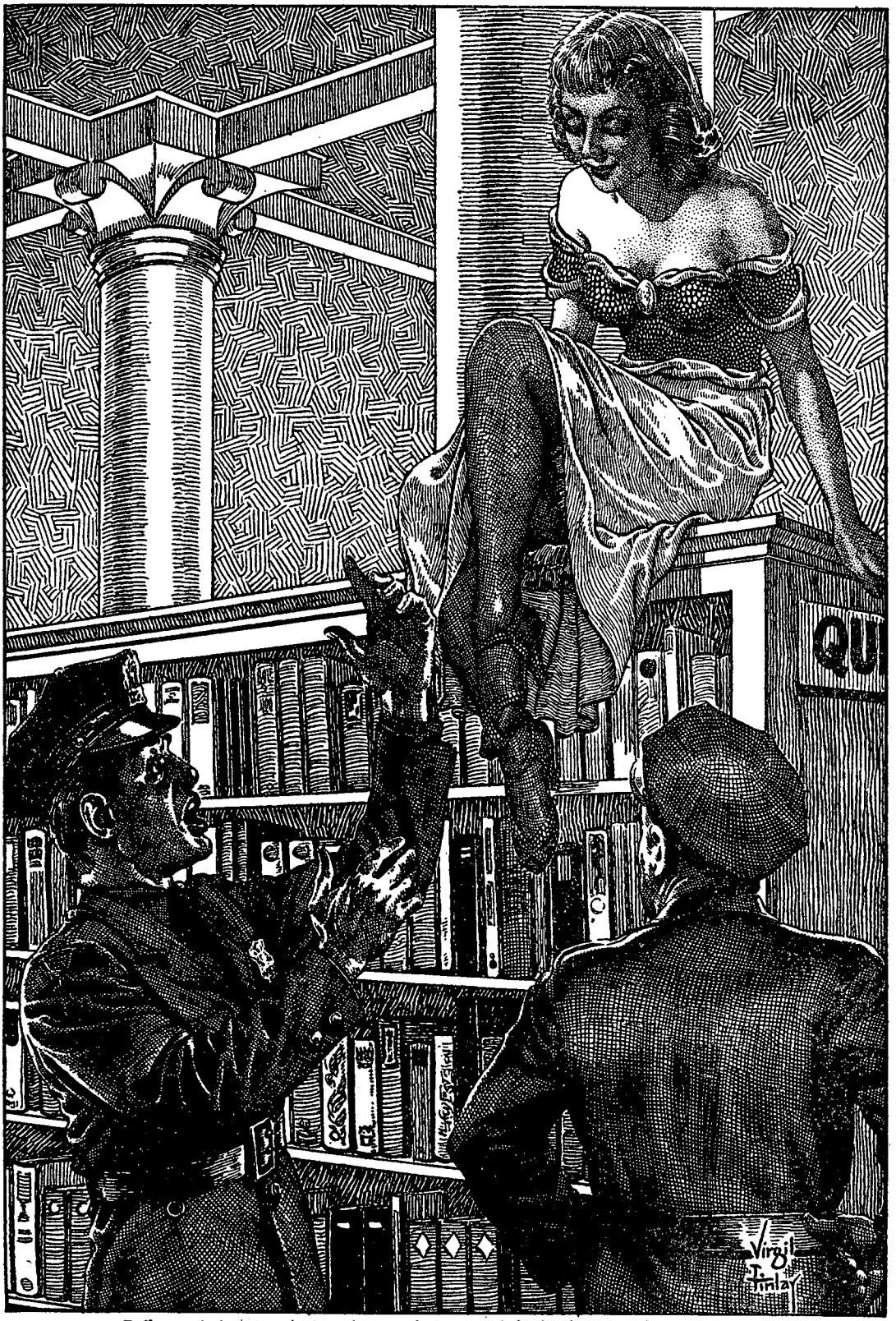
The girl paused a moment, gazed at the glowing sky and frowned. Barely discernible in the distance, a number of tiny storm clouds had bunched themselves together and were rapidly being joined by more of their kind. Thoughtfully Toffee started down the slope and across the valley, her slender hips weaving an indolent rhythm beneath the green transparency of her brief tunic.

She watched the gathering clouds with mixed emotions. They meant, of course, that Marc was suffering some sort of mental annoyance, some sort of anxiety . . . and for that she was sorry. On the other hand, however, they might also be an indication that she was soon to be released into the world of actuality, a prospect that delighted her beyond words. Compared to the well ordered tranquility of Marc Pillsworth's subconscious, the outer world seemed to her a wonderful region of boundless pleasures and delightful excitements. If there was even a remote possibility that she was soon to be materialized in that glittering world she wanted to know about it at the earliest possible moment.

Crossing the valley, reaching the rising slopes at its outer boundaries, she turned into a sharp ravine and stopped. Ahead lay the region of Marc's conscious mind, and she could not enter there, she could only watch from the distance and wait.

Marc's conscious mind . . . at least the portion of it that was visible to Toffee . . . was like nothing so much as a

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Toffee smiled enticingly from her perch on top of the bookcase as the cop gestured wildly . . .

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

great, dark cavern. At one end, however, the darkness was relieved by a large circular screen-like arrangement that reflected scenes and images with a penetrating, third dimensional clarity. These reflections were, of course, of the innumerable things upon which Marc gazed throughout the day. Looking at the screen from within was like looking through a great, round window.

As Toffee watched, the screen registered only a blank expanse of ceiling. Then the scene shifted abruptly, and an oak panel slid into view. A blur followed. Then a window. The window remained a moment, then skidded nervously out of range to be replaced by an eager, hawk-featured face.

Behind Toffee the storm clouds began to thicken and multiply more swiftly.

The face on the screen was furiously animated, the mouth wagging away at a terrific clip. Toffee couldn't hear the words that were the result of this frantic facial activity, but she could watch closely and try to read the lips.

IN HIS private office in the Pillsworth Advertising Agency, Marc Pillsworth stared fixedly at the little man as though trying to will him out of existence. The fellow had been yammering at him steadily for half an hour and had yet to show the first signs of weakening. Marc's gaze wavered and moved wearily to the small green bottle standing before him on the desk. He sighed.

"Just think of it!" the little man was saying. "All humanity will be fairly trampling itself, trying to get *Fixage*. And you will be in on the ground floor for a whole twenty-five percent! Think of it!"

"I don't want to think of it," Marc muttered, then, realizing with a start that he had actually managed to get a word in edgewise, he pressed his advantage. "As I understand it, Mr. Culpepper, you want me to bring this . . . uh . . . this . . ." he waggled a finger at the bottle on the desk ". . . . to the attention of the manufacturers in the interests of gaining a backer. In exchange for this service you will make me a quarter owner of the invention." He fixed the little man with a severe gaze. "In other words, you haven't been able to slither through a single door with the thing . . . except mine. And no wonder, if you ask me. Pills that are supposed to make a person immortal are just too . . ."

The little man held up an arresting hand. "You misunderstand!" he cried. "They don't make you immortal. Mercy, no! Nothing as fantastic as that. Oh, they might prolong your life twenty years or so, but their main effect is to arrest physical deterioration. In other words . . . How old are you, Mr. Pillsworth?"

"Thirty-two," Marc sighed. "But it seems more like fifty."

"Thirty-two! You're right at the peak!"

"If I were at the peak," Marc said, "I would jump off."

"Just think!" the man continued. "Just think what it would mean if you could remain thirty-two for the rest of your life! Even if you live to be a hundred and thirty-two! See what I mean? No loss of faculties. No decrease in vigor. Thirty-two till the day you die! And look at the commercial value of the thing. The women. My word, the women! There isn't a woman alive who wouldn't pauperize her husband and family for a thing like Fixage. They'd be young and beautiful forever!"

"Or young and ugly," Marc murmured. With an air of finality he gripped the edge of his desk and boosted himself to his feet. "And besides, Mr.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Culpepper, this agency is not interested in ventures of this sort. Frankly, I don't see why you came to me at all. When you've a proven product, fully backed and on the market, I will be happy to do business with you. But not until. It's my job to sell things to the public, not the manufacturers."

Seemingly out of nowhere, the little man's finger darted toward Marc's face. "Those wrinkles, Mr. Pillsworth!" the little man rasped. He looked as though he'd just opened the door on a closet full of vampires. "Those marks of worry and age around your eyes! They can be stopped! Permanently!"

Marc backed away, afrighted. For a moment he was very close to hiding his face in his hands. He recovered his poise just in time however.

"This is incredible," he said with hostile dignity. "My wrinkles were come by honestly, Mr. Culpepper, and if you don't mind, I'd prefer not to have them pointed at. Also, I'll thank you to stop talking in headlines and get out of my life and my office. You've already talked me out of my lunch hour and I've a great deal of work to do."

At last Mr. Culpepper seemed to get the idea. He shrugged and turned partly away.

"Oh, well," he said. "I'm willing to wait until you've made up your mind. In the meantime, I'll just leave that bottle with you, and you can think it over. You could even try it yourself and see how it works. You'll be surprised what it will do for you."

"You'll be surprised what I'll do for it," Marc said, "if you leave it here." He picked the bottle up and started around the desk with it. "Here, take it with you. I don't want you to have any excuse to come creeping back in here. Do you have your hat?"

But now the little man was as anxious to leave as Marc was to have him leave. He raced to the door and threw it open.

"Just keep it," he called back. "I'll drop back in a few days." And just before closing the door, he added, "I don't wear a hat."

MARC returned to the desk and sank into his chair. He deposited the bottle before him and regarded it thoughtfully. "Holy smoke," he murmured, "where do they come from, these crackpot ideas?"

The door opened and Memphis McGuire, Marc's secretary, bounded into the room. She was a large, healthy girl with an equally large and healthy contempt for formal office procedures. She hadn't had a decent girdle since the war.

"Hi, boss man," she said airily. "You look awful. What's the big beef?"

"I feel awful," Marc said. "Whatever possessed you to let that little creep in here? Or is this Ground Hog Day?"

"He talked so loud and so fast and so crazy," Memphis said, "I thought he might be a genius. Besides, he kept pointing at my wrinkles in front of the rest of the girls, and a lady can take just so much of that sort of thing. I had to get rid of him somehow. Get on your nerves?"

Marc nodded. "Got on 'em and stayed on 'em. My head is splitting."

"That's bad," Memphis said. "Old man Wheeler just called about his soft drink account. He's on his way over. If you're in bad shape now you'll be in ruins when he gets through with you. We'll have to get you in condition for the attack. Here, come over and stretch out on the lounge and close your eyes."

Marc did as he was told. No use arguing when Memphis was in a Nightingale mood. The secretary made retreating and returning noises and then, without warning, shocked Marc's brow with a damp cloth. She pressed a glass

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of water into one of his hands and two pills into the other.

"Swallow those down," she commanded. "I'll take the glass when you've finished."

Marc obeyed. "Thanks," he said.

"Glad you had some aspirin handy," Memphis said, starting to move away. "I was plum out."

"Yeah," Marc murmured. Then he sat up. "What!"

It struck him, all of a sudden, that he hadn't any aspirin either. A chill went through him. He opened his eyes and glanced at the desk, and his heart accepted an invitation to the rhumba. The little green bottle had moved to the edge of the desk and it was open!

"Memphis!"

Memphis was standing in the doorway. "Shut up," she said. "Lie down, take it easy. I'll stall Wheeler in the waiting room and feed him raw meat to dull his appetite."

She closed the door behind her.

Marc made the length of the room without once noticeably touching the floor. He grabbed the bottle and stared at its label. *"Take one,"* it instructed, *"every six months."*

Panic crept across the silent room, but Marc forced it back.

"Oh, well," he murmured, "there's probably nothing to it. Couldn't be."

Then it hit him.

The nausea came in waves, each one growing deeper and more relentless than the last. Everything was suddenly edged in black and gold, and slowly the room began to sway. Marc felt his knees go weak and he started back toward the lounge, stumbling; if he was going to die, he might as well do it in style. He might have cried out only his throat was suddenly dry and stiff.

TOFFEE fled across the valley and darted into a tiny grove of trees just as the last faint glow in the sky gave way to complete darkness. A driving wind lashed the trees above her in frenetic rhythm, and the darkness was suddenly split by a writhing streak of white lightning. Her hair whipped stingingly across her face, and her tunic pressed flat against her body until it was like a part of her. Her expression, if it could have been seen, was a curious mixture of terror and exhilaration. She steadied herself against a tree and turned into the wind so that her hair blew away from her eyes. She peered into the darkness and waited.

She didn't have to wait long; the storm lasted only a moment and then it was gone. All at once the darkness was replaced by the same diffused glow that had prevailed before its coming, and the valley had returned to its former state of drowsy tranquility. Toffee emerged from the grove and surveyed the valley with expectant eyes. She was not disappointed; a lank figure lay crumpled at the bottom of the knoll. With a little cry of gladness, she ran toward it.

"Marc!" she cried. She threw herself down beside him on the grass. "You devine devil, you! I've been expecting you all day." In a burst of enthusiasm, she threw her arms around him and hugged him to her.

Marc opened his eyes and frowned. "Handle with care," he said thickly. "I think I'm fragile." He glanced around at the valley and his face registered recognition. "So I'm back here again, am I? I'm not dead then."

"You drew a blank," Toffee said. "It was a daisy, too. This valley wasn't fit for man nor any other kind of beast when you hit it. What happened?"

Marc boosted himself forward and ran a lean hand through his sandy hair. "I don't remember," he said. "It must have been terrific, I feel all twisted up

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

inside."

"Just a little shaken up," Toffee said confidently. "You'll be all right. Tell me, just to make conversation, how's your wife? That big blonde?"

"Away," Marc said. "Julie went to Kansas to look after an ailing relative. A cousin, I believe."

Toffee nodded with satisfaction. "Good," she said. "That leaves me a free field, doesn't it?" The speculation in her eyes was undisguised. "We will have fun. Lots."

"Now look here," Marc said, trying to look firm. "Let's not have any horsing around. Just this once why don't you stay here, where you belong? Just because I dream you up that doesn't mean that you have to come popping into my life, messing it up. Be reasonable."

"Sure," Toffee said. "I'll be reasonable . . . dirt cheap, if need be. I'll listen to any proposition you may have to make . . . if it's not too respectable." She twined her arms around his neck. "Kiss me. All this dull talk is beginning to tire me."

Marc was in the midst of shoving her away from him when the storm returned. It came as suddenly and as mysteriously as it had departed, lashing the trees on the knoll against each other, driving the light from the sky. In a sudden start of surprise, Marc clutched Toffee to him.

"Why, you impetuous old rogue!" Toffee cried. "What a clutch!"

For a moment they clung together, helpless under the driving blast of the wind. Then they felt themselves being lifted, as by a giant hand, and hurled into space.

A VARI-COLORED pin-wheel whirled through the darkness and struck Marc squarely between the eyes. Instantly his mind cleared a little, and he opened his eyes. A strip of oak paneling met his gaze, its dark grains writhing before him like water snakes in a pond. He turned over on the lounge and looked at the room. Slowly the room and its objects fell into place and became fixed. He flinched.

Toffee smiled down at him. "Greetings," she said. "Always flat on your back, aren't you?"

Marc gazed at the girl and her brief tunic without pleasure; it was a sight that shocked his finer sensibilities. Surrounded by the severity of the office she looked even more naked somehow than she really was. Absently he tried to imagine her in a more suitable background, but the only setting that occurred to him was one that featured a great deal of plumbing and running water. His mind veered away from a vision that thoroughly repelled him.

"Go 'way," he said. "If you have any shame at all, go 'way and hide yourself. I don't want to look at you."

"You should be so lucky," Toffee retorted. "And don't try pulling any of your phony moralistic airs on me. Remember, I know what's in your mind." She sat down on the edge of the lounge. "How do you feel?"

Marc sat up and considered. He examined his emotions and state of health with care, and was soundly surprised at his findings.

"I feel wonderful!" he exclaimed. "I feel great!"

"Who boffed you?" Toffee asked.

"Boffed?" Marc asked. "How do you mean?" He thought back, trying to remember. "Oh, that!" he said finally. His gaze wandered to the green bottle on the desk. "Those pills. I took a couple." He laughed shortly. "They hit me like a sledge hammer, but they don't seem to have had any serious effects. Memphis gave them to me by mistake just before . . ." His eyes

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

widened. "Oh, my gosh! How long have I been out? Old man Wheeler may walk in here any moment! He mustn't see you!"

"Who's Wheeler?" Toffee asked.

"A client. He's about sixty-eight and as . . ."

"I'll leave," Toffee said. "When they get past sixty I begin to lose interest . . . and patience."

Marc took her by the arm and started her across the room. "You can take the rear door," he said. "It leads to the hallway and . . . Stop twitching your hips like that. When you get outside . . ."

He stopped and made a small whining noise.

It was as though the ceiling had suddenly come crashing down around his head. For a moment he was numb all over. Then he could feel himself sinking toward the floor, but he wasn't falling. The sensation was alarmingly strange and disagreeable.

"What the devil's . . . !"

He stopped again; his voice was echoing back to him in an unfamiliar falsetto. The words were his but the voice definitely was not. He started back in alarm, tripped over something and sat down heavily on the floor. It was then that he glanced up and saw Toffee. For a moment he was certain he was losing his mind.

Instead of the well-curved, half-clad redhead he had last seen, he was now confronted by a chunky little moppet of about eight. Her heretofore inadequate tunic now covered her completely, part of it even trailing on the floor. He opened his mouth to speak but gave it up as Toffee expressed his emotions for him with a shrill scream of dismay. Apparently unmindful of her sudden transformation, however, she was staring at him with horror.

"You've shrunk!" she cried. "You've . . . you've shriveled!"

Her voice, also, had moved up an octave or so.

MARC quickly turned his attention to his own person and found to his complete stupefaction that Toffee spoke the truth. Indeed he had shrunk like a ten-dollar suit in a cloudburst. What he had tripped over had been his own trouser legs, the spare yardage of which was wadded loosely about his ankles.

"Those pills!" he yelped. "Good grief! They've not only stopped my age, they've backed it up!"

Toffee giggled a little hysterically. "You look so funny!" she tittered. Your ears are so big. And . . . and you've got freckles!"

Marc winced; it was probably all too true. As a youngster he had been plagued with these disfigurements and he had been very sensitive about them. After all, being called "pitcher ears" and "leopard puss" hadn't been fun. Outgrowing these names had been his own personal triumph. And now all that was cancelled; he was back where he had started. He looked up woundedly.

"Look who's laughing," he said. "With that pot belly of yours, you're no glamour item yourself."

An expression of utmost horror swept Toffee's face as she ceased to stare at Marc and turned her attention to herself. One quick, shuddering glance told her the story. This time she screamed as though she really meant it.

"No!" she shrieked. "No! NOoooooh! It isn't *me!* It *isn't!*" She turned on Marc, raging. "You did this! You swallowed those crazy pills!" Irrationally, she held her hand under his mouth. "Spit them out!" she demanded. "Spit them out this instant or I'll rip those revolting ears right off your despicable

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

head!"

"Don't be disgusting," Marc said looking away.

"You'll be surprised how disgusting I can really be," Toffee wailed, "if you don't do something about this."

"What can I do?" Marc asked helplessly. "After all the pills were Culpepper's idea, not mine. He's the only one that can do anything about it."

"Get him!" Toffee cried. "Get him! Ring him, call him, wire him, cable him! Only get him!" Her cherubic face began to pucker, her large eyes beginning to cloud. "Wouldn't you know that I'd have to suffer too, just because you were simple-minded enough to take a couple of pills! Wouldn't you know? Look at me! . . . just a shapeless little chunk of blubber. I've got about as much appeal as a smudge pot. Less!"

"Stop your sniveling," Marc said crossly. "It isn't helping matters. And I've got to think."

"Why start now?" Toffee asked waspishly.

Marc thoughtfully rolled up his trousers and got to his feet. Full length, he was even stranger to look upon than when sitting down.

His coat sleeves hung limp at his sides, extending nearly a foot beyond his hands; his shirt collar, previously a perfect fit, was now a perfect scream; his scrawny neck jutted out of it like a wire coat hanger. When he walked, his shoes shifted loosely about his feet, making an annoying clattering noise against the floor. Marc Pillsworth, taken all in all, which really wasn't so very much as things stood, had suddenly become an offense to both eye and ear. Toffee, who, on the other hand, had retained a goodly portion of her comeliness, regarded him with distaste.

"If we ever get out of this, pitcher ears," she said, "I hope you have to go through your adolescence again."

SUDDENLY they both jumped as the door opened and Memphis' head jutted into the room. The secretary opened her mouth to say something, then froze, goggle-eyed. She stared blankly at Marc and Toffee, and they, for want of anything better, simply stared back. There was a long moment of super-charged silence before Memphis found her voice.

"Wh . . . ," she said weakly. "Where's Mr. Pillsworth?"

Toffee laughed bitterly. "That jerk," she murmured.

Memphis smiled stiffly. "I don't know how you got in here, honey," she said with false sweetness, "but you really shouldn't be here; this is a business office."

"You're telling me?" Toffee said. "I'm the kid that got the business in it."

Memphis cleared her throat. "Now why don't you just tell me where Mr. Pillsworth has gone and then run along and play?"

Toffee turned to Marc. "Listen to that overstuffed tomato giving us the rush act," she said. She cast glittering eyes toward Memphis. "For two cents I'd come over there and hammer your big thick shins for you. And if you don't clear out I may decide to do it for free. Beat it yourself. You're bothering us."

Memphis gasped. Then she turned to Marc. "Tell me, sonny," she said, "how does your sister like her spankings . . . sunny side up or over easy? Or are you a wiseacre too? Now, look here . . ." She stopped short as her gaze fell on Marc's sagging costume. Her eyes grew wise and fearful. "You're wearing Mr. Pillsworth's suit!" she shrieked. "What have you done to him?"

"You'd be surprised, Bertha," Toffee sneered. "In my opinion it wasn't half what he deserved."

For a moment Memphis was struck

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dumb. Then her voice came back to her in a lusty scream. She wheeled around and charged out of the room. A second later there was the sound of a telephone dial being put into frenzied motion. Memphis was bawling for the police even as she dialed.

Marc, who had remained in a state of mental and physical paralysis during this disquieting interview, suddenly came to life.

"Now see what you've done!" he piped in his child's voice. "Why couldn't you tell her the truth?"

"She'd have to be daffy to believe it," Toffee said. "Besides, I didn't like her attitude; she was treating me like a child."

"Now we'll have to run for it," Marc said. "Once the police get hold of us, we'll never find Culpepper."

They left the office through the rear door and made their way quickly down the hall to the fire escape window. Marc pointed to a blue convertible in the parking lot below.

"We'll have to try to drive the thing somehow," he said. "After we've gotten away, we'll do what we can about getting in touch with Culpepper."

"I'd like to get in touch with him," Toffee lisped, "with a crowbar."

As Marc was boosting Toffee over the sill and onto the fire escape, a nearby door opened and a large, florid woman stepped into the hallway. She stopped at the sight of the children and observed their activities with alarm.

"Here, here, kiddies," she said, looking maternal, "you mustn't play out there; you might get hurt. Where are your mummy and daddy?"

"Down at the hoosegow," Toffee said evilly. "Mummy's bailing daddy out for peddling hashish at the orphans' picnic. What's it to you?"

"Oh, dear!" the woman exclaimed. "You poor, little, neglected, underprivileged things!" She started forward but was suddenly stopped by a warning glance from Toffee.

"Better stay out of this, fatso," Toffee cooed. "You might get your girdle fractured."

The woman turned red. Then she swung around and continued abruptly down the hall. "Little monsters!" she snorted. "Hope they break their dirty, little underprivileged necks!"

AWAY from the building and in the car, the two inadvertent juveniles found themselves at sharp odds with the mechanical age. Squatting on the floor, Toffee attempted to operate the foot mechanisms while Marc knelt on the seat and tried his small hand at manipulating the steering apparatus and gear shift. After much concentrated effort and grinding of gears they managed jointly to smash the fender of the neighboring sedan. There the operation ended in dismal failure. Time was running out like water in a hair net. Memphis, in the company of two uniformed companions, was gesticulating wildly from a fourth story window.

"Delinquents!" she yelled. "Juvenile fiends! Now they're stealing his car!"

"Duck down!" Toffee rasped. She reached up and pulled Marc down beside her. "Stay out of sight!"

"They've already spotted us," Marc returned. "They'll be down here in a moment." He reached past her and opened the car door. "Crawl out," he instructed. "I'll follow. We can crawl along under the cars."

Like a couple of bemused slugs, they scooted out of the car, under the sedan of the abused bumper and started on a scenic tour of gravel and axles. They had removed themselves from the convertible by only five cars when the sound of flat feet scraping over gravel sullied the quiet afternoon air. Toffee,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

leading the way, peered fearfully from beneath the fender of their current refuge.

"They're closing in," she said. "They've searched your car and now they're fanning out. What'll we do?"

Marc thrust his wide-eared countenance next to Toffee's and surveyed the situation. The policemen, under the supervision of Memphis, were embarked upon a campaign to beat every inch of automotive brush in the entire parking lot. Currently, however, these activities had been arrested by the arrival of the parking lot attendant who, quite understandably, was wanting to know just what was going on. Still the situation looked grim for Marc and Toffee once the search was resumed . . . as it would be in only a second . . . the jig was up. Marc glanced quickly around for possible avenues of escape.

The vehicle next to the one under which they were hiding was a large delivery truck with paneled sides. It was black and rather formidable looking but still it offered a possibility.

"Over there," Marc whispered, pointing to the truck. "Crawl under and toward the back. We can open the rear doors and climb inside without being seen."

Toffee nodded and started out. When they arrived at the rear of the truck, they managed to open the doors and get inside with a certain amount of cooperative pushing and pulling. They closed the doors after them and Marc found an inside catch with which the doors could be locked. They settled back in the dimness to catch their breath.

A removable panel isolated the rear compartment from the driver's cab, cutting off most of the light, and the two fugitives had to feel their way about.

"There's a bundle of rags or something over here," Toffee whispered presently. "Anyway, it's soft. Come on over and sit down."

Marc groped his way across the truck, found the bundle and sat down at Toffee's side.

"Guess there's nothing to do now," he said, "but wait for the worst."

"In the meantime," Toffee said, "what are we going to do about this kiddie business? I don't like it."

"You don't like it," Marc sighed. "I don't like it. And come to think of it, I don't suppose my wife will go for it much either."

"Ouch! Toffee cried suddenly. "Stop it! This is no time for that sort of thing."

"What sort of thing?"

"You pinched me, you big . . . little oaf, and you know it."

"I haven't layed a hand on you," Marc said. "In your present condition, why should I? You flatter yourself."

"Oh yeah?" Toffee said. "I've heard about nasty little boys who run around pinching little girls. If you do it again . . ."

FROM outside there was the sound of approaching footsteps. They moved to the rear of the truck and suddenly the door handles began to rattle. Then they stopped, and a voice called out, "Not in here. All locked up." The footsteps moved away, into the distance.

"Anyway," Toffee said, getting back to the matter of the pinchings, "you keep your offensive little paws to yourself from now on or I'll snap them off."

"You back on that?" Marc asked wearily. "Even in childhood you're dirty-minded, aren't you? One would think that . . . Ow! Of all the spiteful things to do!"

"What did I do?"

"As if you didn't know, tubby," Marc said nastily. "Pinching me behind

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

my back. Literally!'

"I didn't," Toffee said. "Behind your back or anywhere else. I was too busy massaging my own . . ."

"Hissst!"

"Now what?" Marc asked.

"Hissst!"

"Stop that silly hisssting, will you?" Toffee said irritably. "You sound crazy. Probably look it, too."

"Who's hissting?" Marc asked. "I haven't made a sound."

"Hissst!"

Both of them were suddenly on their feet.

"Oh, mother!" Toffee moaned. "Snakes! We're in a pit of snakes. Just listen to the beasts. They're fairly lusting for us!"

"Moses!" Marc gasped. "We've been bitten and hissed at by snakes!"

They froze as the dark compartment suddenly came alive with heavy thumping sounds, intermingled with, "Hisst! Hisssst! Hisssssst!"

"Pythons!" Toffee whinnied. And all but falling over herself, she lunged to the door and threw the catch.

"The cops!" Marc cried. "What about the cops? They're still out there."

"Right now," Toffee said positively, "there is nothing I would love better than a big, tough cop. I'm going to fling myself on the very first one I see and never let go. I'm going to love that ugly cop like a mother."

She threw the door open, and the compartment flooded with light. She was just about to jump to the ground when she glanced quickly back over her shoulder and stopped.

"Look!" she cried, pointing back into the compartment. "It's human!"

For a moment they simply stared at the transformed bundle of rags. In the light it had suddenly developed a head, arms and legs. It was lying on its stomach with its face turned painfully toward them. A crude gag covered the lower half of its face and its hands were lashed behind its back, which probably explained the mysterious pinchings. The feet were bound together like the hands. It said, "Hisst!"

Marc and Toffee ran to it. They knelt beside it, and Marc untied the gag. A small hawk-like face peered up at them.

"Culpepper!" Marc gasped. He turned to Toffee. "It's a snake after all."

The little man sighed with relief. "Hurry and untie me," he said. "They'll kill me."

"And I'll help them," Marc said.

The little man blinked. "How's that?" he asked.

"I'm Pillsworth, Marc said. "Look at me."

"Ah, yes," the little man said. "Mr. Pillsworth's son. I see the resemblance, though your mother must have been an exceptionally large-eared woman. Untie me, sonny, and . . ."

MARC choked. "Don't sonny me, you degenerate genius," he grated. "I'm Marc Pillsworth, the Marc Pillsworth you were chattering to death in his office a little while ago, the Marc Pillsworth who used to be over six feet tall, so that his ears didn't look so big . . . that's the Marc Pillsworth I am, butter brain. I took a couple of your pills. Look at me, you monster!"

"What!" The little man struggled to sit up under his bonds. "You *what!*

"Took a couple of your pills. And frankly, Mr. Culpepper, I am not satisfied with the results. I want my money ba . . . I mean, you've got to get us out of this. My wife isn't going to understand."

"Us?" the little man asked. He glanced at Toffee. "Her, too?"

Marc nodded. "You'd better whip out an antidote or I'll turn you over to

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

whoever is trying to kill you before you can say corpus delicti. I'll even loan them my old blunderbuss which is guaranteed to blast a hole a foot deep in a wall of solid concrete."

"An antidote?" the little man said. "I don't have one. I've been working on one, but I haven't thought it out completely yet. If you'll just get me out of here, I promise to do what I can."

"Untie him," Toffee said, already grappling with the ropes round his ankles. "Hurry."

Marc nodded and set to work on Mr. Culpepper's wrists. "Who's trying to kill you?" he asked.

"Mr. and Mrs. Harper," the little man said. "They want my formula for Fixage. I met them down in the Marlborough district. It's a pretty bad neighborhood. My laboratory is down there in an old building, I couldn't afford anything better. Anyway, I met these people one night . . . I guess I was drinking a little too much . . . and I told them about Fixage and how I was going to make a fortune with it. They were quite impressed. Ah, my dear, that feels good. My feet had nearly gone to sleep."

"Go on," Marc said. "What about the Harpers?"

"Well, I could tell they'd had plastic surgery done on their faces, and I guess I should have suspected them right away. Illegal treatment, you know, thrives down in that part of town. I think maybe they've escaped from the penitentiary or something, but there's no way of identifying them. They broke into my laboratory several times, but I didn't know who it was until now. They're planning to steal my formula and kill me and say they invented Fixage themselves. They followed me here today somehow and grabbed me when I came out."

"Where are they now?"

"They saw me carrying a brief case into the building and they think I've hidden it in there. They've gone back to look for it."

"Where is it?" Marc asked.

The little man chuckled. "In the men's room," he said. "I forgot and left it. They'll never find it there."

"Good night!" Marc said. "Someone else might. Is the formula in it?"

"Oh, no," the little man said. "There's nothing in it but my dirty laundry. I never put my experiments on paper."

"Where is the formula?"

Mr. Culpepper smiled. "In my head," he said. "I work everything out in my head. I just go into a kind of trance and things start coming to me. I don't really need a laboratory at all but it makes a better impression to have one. I just go down there and cook up a pot of coffee once in a while for the sake of appearances."

At last Marc unraveled the snarl of knots about the little man's wrists. "There you are," he said. "Let's go."

HE PROCEEDED to the door of the truck and peeked out. Memphis and the policeman were at a safe distance and seemed too involved in a heated argument to notice anything else. Marc lowered himself to the ground and turned back, holding out his arms. "Here, I'll help you down," he said to Toffee. "Just give me your . . ."

"Now isn't that obliging?" a man's voice said smoothly behind him. "The little tyke's put his hands up without even being told. Good training will tell every time, Agatha, I've always said it."

Something cold and round nuzzled Marc's spine with unrequited affection.

"He shows splendid manners," a woman's voice returned, "for one so

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

young."

Just then Toffee appeared in the doorway. "Oh, my gosh!" she said.

Behind Marc, both holding pistols in gloved hands, were a man and woman of truly stunning elegance. The man was tall and straight and beautifully tailored . . . a gentleman down to the last hand-woven thread. The woman at his side was dark and svelte, and her soft grey suit was so Parisian that her figure was plainly speaking French beneath it. Both of these prepossessing creatures were graced with extraordinary handsome faces. Faint scars whispered the truth; something other than nature had worked these perfections.

"Mr. and Mrs. Harper, I presume?" Toffee drawled, eyeing the guns. "I'm sorry I didn't expect to meet you folks or I'd have fixed up a bit. I must look a mess without my diamond tiara and tommy gun."

The woman eyed Toffee with disdain. "What an offensive child," she murmured. Her words were clipped and exaggeratedly European. "Really, Chadwick, if she keeps on like this, I'm afraid I'll be tempted to do her in."

Chadwick regarded Marc and Toffee with dulled eyes. "It's a sad thing," he said morosely, "when we have to deal with such low types."

"Ah, yes," Agatha replied. "It's a situation that needs mending when we are forced to waste our talents on mere moppets. However . . ." she shrugged philosophically " . . . things will be better when we've gotten the old man's formula. I wonder how they came here?"

"Search me, love."

"Don't ever say that," Agatha warned "Someone might take you up on it."

"S'pose you're right," Chadwick mused. He jostled his gun in Marc's back. "There's a good lad," he said. "Let's hop back in there."

Marc hopped and found himself once more in the more comforting company of Toffee and Mr. Culpepper."

"The Harpers," Mr. Culpepper explained wryly, "are charming people."

"Yes," Toffee said. "Charming, like an emerald-studded hand grenade."

"Culpepper's come untied," Chadwick said outside. "I suppose you'd better ride with them and keep them covered whilst I drive."

"What a bother," the woman lamented. "Oh, well, hand me up."

Chadwick lifted Agatha to the compartment and she stepped lightly inside. Then he closed them in and took his place behind the wheel. The removable panel at the front of the truck slid down and he turned toward them.

"What will we ever do with them, Aggie?" he asked.

"The children?" Agatha said. "Oh, I don't know, dear. Dispose of them in the usual manner, I suppose."

"Yes, I suppose so," Chadwick said. "Only it really doesn't seem quite proper, you know, their being children and all, I mean."

"But they're not very pretty children," Agatha replied. "And after all, when you come right down to it, what are children except just ungrown people?"

"You may be right," Chadwick mused. "Perhaps if we use small bullets . . ."

"I really think we should be getting on, don't you?" Agatha broke in. "I observed several police persons at the end of the lot when we came out."

"Right-ho," Chadwick said.

"Police persons!" Toffee snorted. "Just listen! You'd think this was a garden party!"

AGATHA turned to her with a slow smile. "Quite right," she said.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Tea and bullets will be served directly. And remember, should we be stopped for any reason along the way, you and your little friend will act as our children. You'll call Chadwick daddy and me mummy." She pointed to Toffee. "You're Gwendolyn and the boy is Horace. Mr. Culpepper is your uncle Ben. Understand?"

"Oh, yes," Toffee said brightly. "We're just one big stuffy family. Only if mummy drops her gun, Gwendolyn is going to kick the stuffing out of her, and don't you forget it, sister."

Agatha shuddered delicately. "Please," she said. "Unless you watch your language a bit more closely I'm afraid I'll have to wash your mouth out with cyanide."

Toffee retired to a corner and sat down, folding her arms dispiritedly over her chest. "I wash my hands of this whole affair," she mumbled. "This is the most boring stick-up I've ever been in."

The occasion, thankfully, did not arise for Marc and Toffee to use their unlikely aliases. Uninterrupted, save by traffic lights, the black delivery truck made its way from the center of the city into an old commercial district of derelict buildings and littered streets. Chadwick turned the truck in at an alleyway and pulled to a stop behind an aging, disreputable-looking warehouse. He got out of the car long enough to open a pair of huge barn-like doors and returned to drive the vehicle inside. The little party alighted, and the newcomers were given a brief moment to inspect their surroundings before the doors were closed again, shutting out most of the light.

Bare rafters lay high above them and all the windows had been boarded over. Along the right hand wall a rickety stairway stretched upward to a kind of landing, the outer edge of which was lined with a mouldering railing. Beyond the railing a blank, unpainted wall offered several doors, probably entrances to subsidiary storerooms or offices. Whatever things of value the place had once protected it now harbored only dust and disuse.

"What a lovely little nest," Toffee murmured. "It looks so died in." She turned to Agatha. "With all this, you must feel just like a bird in a gilded cage. A vulture."

"We do not live here," Agatha returned distantly. "We felt, however, that it was more than sufficient for Mr. Culpepper until we were done with him. It will do for you and your little friend, too, now that you're here." She gestured toward the stairway with her gun. "Shall we go up?"

Marc and Toffee, with Mr. Culpepper between them, started up the stairs, and Agatha, Chadwick and their pistols followed. Under their tread the ancient boards screamed threateningly, and the sound echoed weirdly all around them.

"You know, Agatha," Chadwick said suddenly, "just seeing these youngsters has made me rather thoughtful."

"Indeed?" Agatha rejoined.

"Yes, quite." A mellow tone had come into Chadwick's voice. "I was wondering, dear, if it wouldn't be rather nice if we had some children of our own. What do you think, eh?"

"I see no reason why we couldn't," Agatha said agreeably. "There are any number of really well-bred children roving the streets these days. There would be nothing to kidnapping a couple of the nicest."

"No, no," Chadwick said. "That's not what I mean. I thought we might have some that were really our own."

"How *common!*" Agatha exclaimed, truly shocked. "Really, Chadwick!"

"You've no sentiment, Aggie," Chadwick said, a shade of reproach in his

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

voice.

"Oh, really?" Agatha said. "I suppose you've forgotten when we were getting Freddie Freemont's body ready to chuck in the channel? Wasn't it I who wrote 'Bon Voyage, Frederick' in the cement before it dried? And very pretty it was, too, what with the writing wreathing his neck as it did."

"That's right," Chadwick said. "That was quite sweet of you, Aggie."

"I should think so," Agatha said self-righteously. "I could just as easily have written 'Fry in Hell' as Bugsy Turner wanted me to. I was too sentimental, though."

AT THE top of the stairs Agatha, the gushing sentimentalist, directed Marc, Toffee and Mr. Culpepper into the first room to their left, with a curt wave of her gun. Apparently the room had seen service as an office at one time, for there was a sort of teller's window cut into the inner wall. There was a larger window in the opposite wall, but since it was boarded up like all the others, it offered only a bare minimum of air and light. In the center of the room an old packing crate had been turned face down so as to provide a resting place for a silver tea service and several extremely potent looking bottles. A number of fruit boxes had been distributed around the room to serve as chairs, and the floor was generously littered with mashed out cigarettes.

When her guests were seated, Agatha stood back, studied them and frowned. "Oh, Chad," she said. "They're so ordinary!"

"There, there, Aggie," Chadwick said, stroking her cheek affectionately with the nose of his gun. "In business you can't always associate with the best. It's all part of the game, you know."

"Some game," Toffee said sourly. "I could stage a better crime wave with a water pistol."

Agatha swung on Toffee, eyes blazing. "You soiled little hoyden!" she fumed. "You should be honored. Chadwick and I were the most celebrated thieves in Europe before the war. We robbed kings, I'll have you know. Our names were on aristocratic lips all through the continent."

"What's the matter?" Toffee said. "Did those aristocratic lips spit you out finally? Why didn't you stay on the continent?"

"Don't think we couldn't have," Agatha said with a little lift of her chin. "People were practically begging us to stay and rob them." She sighed. "However, they were only putting up a front; they had nothing really worth robbing. They only wanted the social prestige that one of our robberies could give them. We were forced to come to America." She made a wry face. "They're all like you here; want a lot of shooting and uncouth language with their hold-ups. No appreciation for continental finesse. That's why we've decided to take Mr. Culpepper's formula. We're going into business. It's a shameful come-down, of course, but I suppose we'll just have to make the best of it."

"You poor, brave things," Toffee said. "My nose fairly runs for you."

"Oh!" Agatha exploded. "Little pig!"

"Big pig!" Toffee shot back.

"Here, here," Chadwick broke in. "This bickering has got to stop. Really. There's business to be taken care of."

Agatha nodded and turned her attention to Mr. Culpepper. "Shall we torture it out of him?" she asked.

"I think so," Chadwick said. "That's why I've brought the pliers . . . to pull his fingernails, you know. I thought it might cheer you up, old girl. Remember when we used that method on the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Marquis?"

Forgetting her gun, Agatha clasped her hands together. "Oh, what a triumph!" she exclaimed. "The Marquis was simply enthralled. He said it was the most exquisite torture he'd ever experienced."

"Is everybody nuts in Europe?" Toffee asked. "Or just your particular crowd?"

No one answered her.

"What a shame," Chadwick said, "to waste such divine methods on a commoner." He removed a pair of silver, leather-encased pliers from his jacket pocket and held them out proudly. He turned to Mr. Culpepper. A look of injury spread over his handsome features.

The little scientist, far from shivering with delighted horror over his impending torture, had closed his eyes and was leaning back against the wall in an attitude of deep meditation. At his side, Marc was staring eagerly at the thoughtful face. The two seemed completely oblivious to all else except themselves.

A FLAME of anger flickered in Chadwick's eyes. "Oh, really!" he exclaimed. "If that's the way it's going to be, I've half a mind not to pull his nails at all. He doesn't deserve it."

Agatha moved quickly to his side. "Now, don't lose your temper, love," she said. "You must force yourself. So much depends on it."

"Oh, very well," Chadwick said sullenly. He strode to Mr. Culpepper's side and stamped his foot. "Peasant!" he sneered.

Marc looked up, startled, and quickly put a finger to his lips. "Shhh!" he said. "Culpepper's working on an antidote. If you disturb him he may not get it finished. He works everything out in his head, you know."

"Well!" Chadwick exploded. "Of all the . . . !" He reached down and shook the scientist's shoulder. "Wake up!" he commanded.

Mr. Culpepper opened his eyes and gazed up at Chadwick, but it was apparent that he didn't really see him. His eyes were glazed and introspective. His mouth fell open to complete an expression of sheerest idiocy.

"My word!" Agatha breathed. "What's happened to him?"

"I don't know," Chadwick said decisively, "but I do know what's *going* to happen to him." He grasped Mr. Culpepper's hand and separated the little finger from the others. "Let's see him work this out in his mind."

Now that he was getting down to business, Chadwick seemed to experience a lift in spirit. "I think this will snap him out of it." He said it like a doctor about to administer the shock treatment to a mental patient. He hummed softly to himself.

"Oh, Mona!" Toffee moaned. "Just look at him! Happy as a hophead with a new poppy patch!"

She glanced at Mr. Culpepper but the little man had closed his eyes again, completely unaware that fate had singled him out for the main attraction at a sadistic fun fest. At his side, his eyes riveted on the advancing pliers, Marc was rigid in a state of white-faced paralysis.

Toffee darted from her place just as the pliers closed over Mr. Culpepper's nail. "Stop that!" she cried. She ran to Mr. Culpepper and shook him. "Wake up!" she pleaded. "Tell them the silly formula and let them have it!"

Mr. Culpepper's mouth snapped shut, but other than that, there was no reaction. She shook him again, but with no further result. Her eyes darted to his outstretched hand, and

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

she gasped. Chadwick was beginning to pull.

Toffee sucked in a deep breath. "I . . . I'll tell!" she faltered. "I know the formula. I'll give it to you."

The pliers came apart and Mr. Culpepper's small, veined hand fell limply to the little man's side. Toffee found herself instantly and confusingly confronted by Chadwick and Agatha.

"You know the formula?" Agatha said. "You'd best not be lying."

"Why . . . I . . ." Toffee stammered.

"Speak up!" Chadwick snapped.

"I know all about it," Toffee said. The words came in a rush. "I was his human subject. He experimented on me in his laboratory. You'd never guess that I'm really twenty years old, would you?"

The two looked at her suspiciously.

"She's lying," Agatha said. "She couldn't be twenty."

"Oh, yes," Toffee insisted, warming up to the lie. "Mr. Culpepper lured me into his laboratory with a stick of candy when I was only eight years old. I haven't aged a day since."

"Might be right at that," Chadwick mused. "After all, you'll have to admit that her language is rather advanced for just a child . . . in an appalling sort of way."

"Can you prove what you say?" Agatha asked.

TOFFEE hesitated. "Well," she said presently, "in a way, I can. There's another thing about Fixage that you don't know."

"Yes?" Chadwick and Agatha chorused. "What's that?"

Toffee beckoned them closer and whispered, "It causes you to be immortal."

"Oh, no," Agatha said. "That's going too far."

"I'll prove it," Toffee said. "I don't suppose you'd be willing to loan me a gun for a moment?"

"Certainly not," Chadwick said. "These pistols came from the home of a duke. The fellow would never forgive us if we loaned them."

"That's what I thought," Toffee said. She shrugged. "In that case . . ." She started toward the door.

Marc, having come to life again when Mr. Culpepper's finger was delivered from the hand of Chadwick, suddenly ran to Toffee's side. Together they moved through the doorway, and Chadwick and Agatha followed. Mr. Culpepper, for his part, continued to slumber contentedly in his corner.

Outside on the landing, Toffee went with business-like directness to the outer railing and started to climb over it.

"Good heavens, child," Agatha said. "What are you doing?"

"I'm going to jump," Toffee said. "You'll agree, won't you, that such a fall would kill most people?"

"Oh, but you mustn't!" Agatha cried, shocked. "You'll make a mess on the floor!"

"You'll see," Toffee said. She wriggled her plump little body to the top of the railing and peered into the well of darkness beneath her.

"Stop her!" Agatha cried. "Fetch her back, Chad! She may splatter the auto and ruin the finish!"

Chadwick reached out toward Toffee, but just as his hand went to her, there was a terrible splintering sound, and the railing began to crumble. Then the railing gave way entirely and Toffee's small figure pitched forward, plunged into the darkness below.

On the landing the three tensed, then started a bit as a dull thump echoed up to them from below.

"Oh, gracious!" Agatha wailed. "I

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

just know she struck the auto!"

"What do you suppose ever made her do it?" Chadwick mused. He shrugged. "Just suicidal, I guess, by nature."

"You'll wash the car," Agatha said adamantly. "I won't do it."

Beside them, Marc had turned away from the railing and was peering anxiously down the darkened stairway. A smile suddenly lighted his face as the ancient boards sent up their accustomed cry.

"Heavens!" Agatha said. "Whatever could it be?"

"I haven't the faintest . . ." Chadwick said. "One thing, it surely couldn't be the child."

BUT it was the child. Emerging from the darkness, Toffee raced up the stairs, smiling and completely unmarked. For a brief instant her eyes flicked in Marc's direction and her lips silently formed the word "thanks."

Marc understood. It was only through his concentration that she had survived. As long as he was aware of her and "wished" her into being, she was indestructible. Her life could be threatened only when his was.

"Lord," Chadwick breathed. "The little waif's all right!"

"Chad!" Agatha cried, turning to him. "Do you realize what this means? We . . . we . . . I almost can't say it, it's so wonderful . . . we can be *immortal!* All we have to do is get the formula. No one will be able to kill us! We can go where we choose, take what we like, and no one can ever stop us. Perhaps we could organize a whole band of immortals and . . ."

"Certainly!" Chadwick cried, catching her enthusiasm. "We could rule the world if we chose! Who would there be to stop us? We'd be indestructible!"

They turned to Toffee in unison.

"What's the formula?" Chadwick asked, beginning to look a little feverish. "Tell us what it is."

For a moment Toffee was pensive, then a touch of craftiness came into her childish face. "I'll do better than that," she said. "I'll take you to a whole bottle of the pills, all made up and ready to take."

"Wonderful!" Agatha cried.

Mr. Culpepper was suddenly recalled to them by a sudden, triumphant cry that issued from the inner reaches of the abandoned office. In a body they turned back and crowded through the door.

"Fancy that!" the little man was shouting. "Just fancy that!" A smile of amazement was on his sharp-featured face.

"Have you got it?" Marc asked, running to his side.

"I certainly have," Mr. Culpepper said happily. "It was a very difficult experiment, but I got it. And will you be surprised!"

"What has he got?" Chadwick asked.

"Perhaps it would be better not to ask," Agatha said. "From the way he's been behaving it might be anything."

Chadwick nodded. "I wouldn't be surprised. Besides, we've other fish to fry now. Let's be on our way." He started to the door. "I'll get the car started and you bring them down."

When he had gone, Agatha stepped over to the doorway and motioned with her gun. "Come, come," she said brightly. "Time to be leaving, everyone."

Toffee promptly took to the stairs, but Marc and Mr. Culpepper seemed to hesitate, too absorbed in a whispered conversation to take much note of anything else.

"You could have knocked me over with a noodle," Mr. Culpepper was saying. "I simply couldn't believe it

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

at first."

"Well, what is it?" Marc asked impatiently. "For Pete's sake, tell me!"

The little man leaned closer to Marc's ear. "Common spirits!" he hissed importantly. "Whiskey!"

"No!" Marc was incredulous. "You must have made some mist . . . !"

"Here, here," Agatha said, making impatient motions with her gun. "No loitering. I'm really not going to speak to you again."

"That's a break," Marc said.

He and Mr. Culpepper started forward and as they passed the inverted crate in the center of the room Marc dropped momentarily behind. When he emerged a moment later a rather singular bulge had appeared in the region of his shirt front, and he was clutching his stomach.

"What's the matter with you?" Agatha asked wearily.

"Bellyache," Marc announced flatly, struggling past her. "You make me sick at my stomach."

Agatha's expression became pained. "Vile little boy," she murmured.

IT WAS dark when the delivery truck nosed out of the alley and headed back toward the city. Having locked the doors to the rear compartment from the outside, Agatha had taken her place beside Chadwick in the front, her pistol draped elegantly over her shoulder. She had been keeping a sharp eye trained toward the compartment, but it was too dark back there for her to see much. Her charges, however, seemed disinclined toward revolt. In fact, as the trip wore on, they appeared to become positively hilarious about the whole thing. Soft tittering occasionally issued from the darkness, sometimes interlaced with boisterous guffaws. Agatha wondered about this but didn't discover the reason for it until the truck reached its destination and pulled to a stop in the parking lot behind Marc's office building. When she unlocked the doors and reopened them, Marc, Toffee and Mr. Culpepper peered out at her owlishly, swaying together in silent harmony.

"Good ol' Aggie," Marc giggled, dropping his appropriated bottle shatteringly at the woman's feet. "Long may she rave."

"Well, I'll be!" Agatha murmured. "They're drunk as skunks, the lot of them."

"Eh?" Chadwick inquired, moving to her side. "Who's drunk?"

"The tykes," Agatha said, "and the old man. They're lubricated, you might say, like a lawn mower in May."

Chadwick peered inside, gazed unbelievingly at the swaying trio. He wagged a finger. "Shame," he said. He reached inside and lifted Toffee out.

Made forgetful of her transformation by her recent libations, Toffee twined her arms around Chadwick's neck.

"Hello, handsome," she cooed throatily.

"Put her down," Agatha snapped. "There's something not quite right about that child. I don't like the funny way she's looking at you. I won't stand for it."

Apparently Chadwick, too, had noticed something a bit unusual about the infant in his arms, but was not entirely displeased. He smiled confusedly. "She's only a youngster," he said.

"I don't care," Agatha retorted. "Youngster or not, no female is going to look at you like that and get away with it. Why, even at twenty I hadn't a gleam in my eye like that."

"Oh, I wouldn't say that, my dear," Chadwick said. "I remember a night when you were only eighteen. . . ."

"Enough!" Agatha commanded with agitation. "There's something improper

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

about that child and you're to put her down this instant. I shudder to think what she'll be like when she grows up. If she ever does, that is."

At this juncture Mr. Culpepper hopped out of the truck, teetered precariously on one foot for a moment, and sprawled out on the ground. Propping his head up on one elbow, he gazed up at Agatha, a new boldness in his eye. He winked debonairly.

"Hi, yuh, toots," he gurgled.

Agatha appeared to have bitten into a sour apple. "Ugh!" she said. "How depraved!"

Except for occasional dim lights on the stair landings the office building was completely dark. The labored progress of the strange party wending its way to the fourth floor was accompanied by a fruity assortment of stumblings, curses and giggles. When they finally arrived at the offices of the Pillsworth Advertising Agency, Marc handed his keys to Mr. Culpepper under the false impression that the little man could better negotiate the keyhole. To the befogged scientist, however, the lock was a writhing, squirming thing that constantly and with utter perverseness, avoided his grasp. The struggle became a very personal thing with the little man. He threw himself against the door with all his might.

"Won't hold still, eh?" he challenged. "Well, we'll see about that!"

With a snort of disgust, Agatha took the keys from the little man, shoved him aside, and opened the door. With a curt nod she directed the others inside.

THE journey through the outer office was accomplished without mishap, though Mr. Culpepper, running afoul of a swivel chair, had to be restrained from attacking the whirling piece of furniture bodily. Marc and Toffee took him in charge and guided him gently into Marc's private office, where Agatha and Chadwick had preceded them and turned on the lights.

Agatha turned on Toffee threateningly. "Well, we're here," she said. "Where are the pills?"

Toffee nodded toward the desk. "Over there," she said. "The green bottle."

At the sight of the bottle both Agatha and Chadwick seemed to lose a good deal of their dignified reserve; they fairly trampled each other in a rush for the desk. Reaching the bottle, they grappled openly across the desk for its possession. Marc and Toffee dropped Mr. Culpepper to the lounge and stood by for developments.

"Give it here!" Agatha shrilled. "Let me have it, do you hear!"

"I'll let you have it right enough," Chadwick grunted back at her. "I'll let you have it right in the eye with my fist."

"Louse!" Agatha yelled. "I'm going to be head of this organization. I have the brains anyway."

"Since when?" Chadwick jeered. "If it weren't for me you'd still be carrying grog behind a bar."

"Yes," Agatha said evilly, trying to twist the bottle out of his hand, "and you, sponge that you are, would be soaking it up as fast as I could carry it. Give me that bottle, you old rummy."

"Take your grasping claws off it," Chadwick said levelly, "before I lose my temper. I'll see that the pills are handled properly."

"Properly for whom?" Agatha rasped. "You'd hog them all for yourself, that's what you'd do!"

Both of them stood their ground. The struggle was apparently one to the finish; obviously whichever of them emerged the victor would be in control of the other forever after. Deep within

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

them primitive instincts had been set to work to choose the chieftain . . . or chieftainess, as the case might be . . . of their proposed "organization." As the contest left the field of invective and entered onto the more taxing one of physical, brute force, they both seemed to forget their captives. Dropping their guns to the floor, first Agatha, then Chadwick, they shoved their free hands in each other's faces and began to push. At this, Marc and Toffee, with a little cry of triumph, acted as a team in swooping away from the lounge and retrieving the guns from the floor.

Looking somewhat like an infant Annie Oakley, Toffee stepped back, aimed her pistol in the general direction of the battling Harpers and shouted, "Stick 'em up!"

But the Harpers had other things on their minds. Chadwick had just let out an enraged bellow as Agatha's even, white teeth had bitten into one of his fingers.

Toffee looked helplessly at Marc. "What'll we do?" she asked.

Marc was already doing it. Aiming at the ceiling, he brought a shower of plaster thunderously down over the scene of the battle. The Harpers instantly became transfixed, a frozen study of hand-to-hand combat. Leaning over the table, their faces almost together, they stared fixedly at each other through a screen of fingers. They had the look of people suddenly remembering something very important.

"Hands up!" Toffee piped.

THE Harpers came to life in the same moment and reacted with their customary single-mindedness. Two pairs of hands shot into the air, and as a result the bottle crashed to the top of the desk, pills rolling in all directions. The desk and portions of the floor around the desk seemed to have been the scene of a recent snowstorm.

"I'll keep them covered," Toffee told Marc. "You get the police."

"The police?" Marc said. "How will we explain who they are? With their new faces, I mean. For that matter, how will we explain who *we* are? The cops are looking for us, too, you know."

"I see what you mean," Toffee said thoughtfully. "It's rather an impasse, isn't it?" She turned to Mr. Culpepper who, roused by the sound of the shot, was now weaving his way toward them. "What about that antidote?" she asked him. "If whiskey's supposed to restore us, heaven knows we've had whiskey aplenty."

"Takes time," the little man said thickly. "Mustn't expect miracles, you know."

"Oh, mustn't I?" Toffee said with sudden heat. "You change me into a miserable little blob of flab and then you have the gall to tell me not to expect miracles. That's a laugh . . . a fair howl."

The little man chuckled. "It is rather humorous, isn't it?" he said.

"I ought to kick in your bridgework," Toffee said dully.

"You don't like me," Mr. Culpepper said with no particular expression. "You think I'm disgusting."

"You think you're kidding," Toffee said. "You've just shown real insight."

"Thank you," the little man said gravely. "Sometimes I think . . ."

In a start of surprise he lurched to one side, grasping a chair for support. His eyes, like Agatha's and Chadwick's, were fastened on Marc and Toffee. Suddenly, the two erstwhile youngsters had begun to stretch upward like a pair of extending telescopes. They were growing and aging with the speed of lightning, it seemed. In a matter of seconds Marc became once again a tall, serious-eyed businessman . . . one that had un-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

accountably rolled up his trousers to go wading. At his side Toffee was again a scantily clad redhead . . . a fine figure of a girl with a fine figure. The effect was impressive to say the least. The Harpers gasped in unison.

Toffee stretched out one of her exquisite legs and surveyed it with satisfaction. "Well, that's more like it," she said happily. "A girl can really get places with a pair of pins like that."

"I told you!" Agatha shrieked. "I told you there was something funny about her. Only it isn't funny!"

"Oh, Lord," Chadwick murmured. "I've never seen anything so weird in all my life. How did they manage it?"

"Don't ask me," Agatha said unhappily. "I don't like to even think about it."

Marc had also stretched out a leg, but the sight of it seemed to give him no particular pleasure. Hastily, still holding his gun on Agatha and Chadwick, he reached out and rolled down his trousers.

"Well, thank heaven that's over," he sighed. "What a relief."

"Hypnosis," Chadwick said to Agatha. "That's what it is. Either they hypnotized us into thinking they were children a while ago, or they're hypnotizing us now to make us think they're adults. I wonder which they really are?"

"I don't care," Agatha said with sudden disillusion. "I don't care if they're really a pair of Newfoundland puppies. I don't care about anything anymore."

"I told you," Mr. Culpepper said to Toffee. "It worked like a charm. Now you don't have to be sore at me any more."

Toffee favored the little man with a radiant smile. "I could kiss you," she said recklessly.

"Please do," Mr. Culpepper said.

"Later," Toffee said. "Much later." She turned to Marc. "The decks are clear. Call the cops. Let's get rid of these regal rats."

Marc nodded and retired to the telephone. "We can say they broke in here," he said, "if all else fails."

Toffee, in the meantime, had leveled her gun on the Harpers. "Turn-about is some fun, eh, kids?" she said. "And while we're waiting for the cops, why don't you tell us what really happened to the Duchess of Windsor's jewels? Remember, anything you say will be used to hang you."

Mr. Culpepper teetered to Toffee's side. Screwing his face into what he fondly believed to be a romantic pucker, he lifted himself to his toes and growled, "Kiss me, baby," a la Clark Gable. He wavered a moment and then fell forward.

IT MIGHT have been the perverse paw of destiny that sent the little man crashing against Toffee. Otherwise, the situation involving the Harpers, Mr. Culpepper and Fixage might easily have righted itself on the spot. The Harpers might have been carted off to the pokey in chains; Mr. Culpepper might have returned to his laboratory for a late pot of coffee; Fixage might have become an unpleasant memory, and Marc and Toffee might have been free to disport themselves in any way that pleased them. It might have happened that way. But it didn't.

Under Mr. Culpepper's sudden weight Toffee tottered a moment, then crumpled to the floor, dropping her gun. She showed splendid presence of mind in retrieving the gun swiftly enough to ward off any attack from the Harpers. But she wasn't quick enough to prevent the enterprising twosome from scooping up handfuls of the scattered pills and greedily popping them into their mouths.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Don't!" Toffee screamed, leaping to her feet. "Spit them out!"

Agatha swallowed mightily and gasped for air. She laughed shortly. "Too late now," she said triumphantly.

"You've no idea," Toffee said. "If you did, you'd be courting a stomach pump with everything that's in you."

Marc slapped the telephone receiver back into place. "Good night," he murmured, aghast. "Whole handfuls of the things!"

Chadwick managed to choke down his generous grabbings. "Well," he said with satisfaction, "now we'll see what's what."

"And probably a good deal more," Toffee said. "If we can bear to look." She glanced down at Mr. Culpepper who was still resting quietly on the floor. "What can we do about it?"

The little man shrugged, uninterested. "You cheated," he mumbled. "You ducked."

"We ought to do something right away," Marc put in. "Maybe a stomach pump isn't such a bad idea. In a minute it'll be too late. There's a . . ."

It was already too late.

The Harpers had suddenly turned an unfortunate shade of whitish-green. They clutched at each other in a paroxism of agony, shuddering from head to toe. Then, seized by a rending spasm that nearly doubled them, they slid soundlessly to the floor.

"Oh, Chad . . !" Agatha whimpered. Her head fell loosely to the pit of Chadwick's stomach. "Ohhhh!" And then she passed out.

Chadwick was unmoved by his mate's pitiful lamentations; he had been dead to the world even before he touched the floor.

Toffee regarded the crumpled figures at her feet. "How terrible!" she breathed. "Do you suppose they're dead?"

Marc shook his head. "They're still breathing," he said.

Mr. Culpepper, after a number of false starts, finally made it to his feet. His eyes wandered loosely about the room for a time, and finally arrived at the bodies on the floor.

"With all their fine manners," he mused, "you'd think they'd find a more suitable place to retire."

"Oh, shut up," Marc sighed. "If you don't I may cram a few of those pills down your gullet."

AGATHA and Chadwick remained in their state of enforced slumber only a few minutes. Then, almost at the same time, they awoke and opened their eyes. Chadwick glanced dazedly around, stretched luxuriously and yawned a cavernous yawn. Agatha, however, seemed to suffer no after effects at all. She merely opened her eyes, surveyed the situation briefly and went directly to the business at hand. Getting to her feet, she regarded Marc and Toffee triumphantly.

"Well," she sneered, "now we'll see about that turn-about stuff. You needn't try to scare us with those guns any longer, either." She turned and helped Chadwick to his feet.

"What happened?" Chadwick asked. "What hit me?"

"The pills," Agatha reminded him. "We're all set, love. We've nothing more to worry about. Shall we quit this dreadful place?"

"Oh, yes," Chadwick smiled. "We did take the pills, didn't we? We're bullet-proof. To coin an expression, the world is practically ours."

Agatha took him by the arm. "Yes, dear," she said gaily. "Tax free, too. Shall we duck out and rifle a few banks just for a starter?" her voice was exuberant, almost giddy.

"Right-ho," Chadwick said agree-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ably. "And maybe a jewelry shop or two, eh? Just for good luck."

They started happily toward the door, too wrapped up in their gold-tinted dreams of the future to notice the fascinated, expectant gaze of their erstwhile adversaries. They were almost into the outer office when it happened. Unquestionably it was the shock of their lives.

They seemed to melt like popsicles in a furnace. They dwindled so swiftly there was the faint sound of disturbed atmosphere, a little rush of air. Suddenly their clothes were hanging loosely about them, the ends of their sleeves trailing on the floor. And they were still melting. Agatha screamed with terror; and even as she did her voice faded away into a thin, childish wail.

"Oh, heavens!" Toffee cried. "They took too much. They're disappearing entirely!" She buried her face against Marc's shoulder. "I can't look!"

Marc and Mr. Culpepper stared at the spectacle with open-mouthed amazement.

It was a long time before Toffee found the courage to turn away from Marc's shoulder. When she did, her eyes moved apprehensively toward the door, and then she made a little whimpering sound. Two forlorn little piles of clothing lay there, one on either side of the doorway.

"Ohhh, Lord," Toffee breathed. "They're gone . . . completely gone. There's nothing left of them, not even a whisper."

"'Fraid you're right," Marc said. "Fixage fixed 'em."

Mr. Culpepper had been greatly sobered by the disappearance of the Harpers. "I had no idea," he muttered woodenly. "No idea at all."

"I feel sorry," Toffee said. "I can't help it. They were so proud and so elegant . . . even if they were just a couple of rats."

"Rats indeed!"

Toffee started as though slapped in the nether regions with a cactus. The voice had been nothing more than a tiny whine, a mere vibration, but it had seemed to come from the heap of clothing that had been Agatha's. Toffee streaked across the room and knelt beside the crumpled garments. They seemed furiously agitated.

With deft fingers Toffee dug inside the clothing. First she uncovered a tiny, wrinkled hand, then an arm and finally an entire baby. The infant was very red of face and its small features were screwed up into an expression of extreme annoyance. Its button eyes blazed malevolently as it gazed at Toffee. It gritted its tiny teeth.

"Witch!" it hissed. "Oh, the things I would call you if I weren't a lady."

"Agatha!" Toffee cried. She lowered the infant back onto the pile of clothing and turned to the tangle of male garments on the other side of the door.

A BRIEF search through a coat, a shirt and an undershirt uncovered Chadwick, also in an acute state of infancy. When he looked up and saw Toffee staring down at him he blushed furiously.

"Give me my trousers!" the baby demanded hotly. "Stop staring at me and give me my trousers!"

"Well, for heaven sake!" Toffee exclaimed.

She placed the depleted Harpers side by side on the lounge, and Marc and Mr. Culpepper moved to her side. As babies, the erstwhile thieves were markedly unbeautiful, and Toffee musingly remarked as much. At this the infant Agatha surprisingly forgot herself and poured out a string of oaths such as would have done credit to a stevedore on a hot day. Chadwick continued to

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

blush.

"What are we going to do with them?" Toffee asked. "We can't turn them over to the police like this."

"Certainly not," Marc agreed. "And we can't keep them around. If my wife should suddenly come home and find me with a couple of babies . . ." He shuddered at the thought. "We'll have to restore them." He turned to Mr. Culpepper. "We can do that, can't we?"

"Yes!" Toffee cried. "We could bring them back to what they were before their faces were changed, couldn't we? That would solve everything."

This suggestion provoked a discordant howl from the infant Harpers.

"I don't know," the little scientist mused. "It could be done all right, but it would have to be done very carefully. We'd have to give them spirits in exact amounts. A little too much one way or another . . ." He stroked the tip of his nose with a slender finger. "Figuring on the basis of the amounts that you and Mr. Pillsworth consumed to restore yourselves, I could probably . . ." He retreated to the chair behind Marc's desk, tilted his head back and closed his eyes. "Yes, yes," he murmured dreamily.

"Will you just listen!" Agatha piped. "They're going to work us out a whiskey formula."

"I don't care what they work out," Chadwick replied, rolling unhappily over onto his fat little stomach. "I want some clothes. I'm cold and embarrassed."

"See if you can find something for them to wear," Marc said, turning to Toffee. "Try the model's dressing rooms in the photographer's studio; there may be something there." He glanced briefly at Toffee's faintly obscured figure. "And while you're about it," he added, "you might pick up something for yourself."

Toffee nodded and left the room. When she returned she was resplendent in a shimmering ice-blue evening gown that had a very conservative neckline . . . provided a girl's neck, by some freak of nature, commenced somewhere in the region of her midriff. The glistening material clung tightly to her body, highlighting its more provocative features. When she walked she shimmered with a loveliness that seemed almost unreal.

In her hand she was carrying two brief lengths of black velvet. These she twined haphazardly around the rather brief figures of Agatha and Chadwick.

"How's that little wretch coming with our formula?" Agatha asked.

"Yes," Chadwick put in, "I could do with a spot or two very nicely just now."

Toffee glanced at Mr. Culpepper who, for all the world, seemed merely to be enjoying a sound sleep. His facial muscles twitched occasionally, though, giving testimony to the experimental processes that were being accomplished inside.

"Keep your diapers on," Toffee said. "He's doing what he can."

"Oh, well," Chadwick sighed. "I suppose there's really no hurry. They'll only turn us over to the police when we're restored."

"I don't care," Agatha said, eyeing Toffee's new loveliness with envy. "I'd rather rot in jail than be left to go on groveling around like this."

THERE was a sudden snort from Mr. Culpepper as his head snapped forward, and his eyes opened. "I have it," he announced composedly. "As I have it figured, ten jiggers of strong whiskey should restore them to what they were six months ago." He turned to Marc. "Do you have any liquor

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

handy?"

Marc shook his head. "We'll have to go out for it."

"Very well," Mr. Culpepper said. "I'll go."

"No. We'll all have to go," Marc said. "We can't risk staying here. The cleaning ladies will be around this way soon. If they saw this . . ." he indicated the babies and Toffee, ". . . there would be a scandal that would make Hollywood furious with envy."

Leaving the building, the Pillsworth party was one to startle and confound, a woman in a revealing evening gown carrying two velvet-swathed babies and accompanied by two extremely uneasy looking gentlemen, was a sight to give pause to even the most careless-minded citizen. Indeed, several citizens not only paused but stopped cold in their tracks as they saw the strange group moving toward them. With grave dignity, though, glancing neither to the right nor to the left, the ill-matched fivesome proceeded to the end of the block, waited in heavy silence for a change of traffic signals, crossed the street and disappeared through the doors of a retail liquor store. There they were greeted by a large, befuddled looking merchant.

The merchant surveyed his approaching customers with silent disbelief. Then he seemed to shake himself from an absorbing dream.

"This is a liquor store," he said dully.

"Yes, we know," Toffee said politely. "That's why we've come."

"I just thought I'd mention it," the merchant said unhappily, clearing his throat. He glanced out the window and closed his eyes a minute. Then he turned back to the group before the counter and seemed to be surprised all over again.

"Since you're really here," he said, "what can I do for you?"

"We'd like a bottle of strong whiskey," Toffee said. She turned questioningly to Mr. Culpepper who nodded back to her approvingly. "The strongest you have."

"Two bottles!" a tiny voice suddenly piped from the depths of one of the velvet bundles. Chadwick's small head bobbed into sight. "Make it two! And make it snappy!"

Agatha's head was only a moment behind Chadwick's in making its appearance. "Sot!" she accused. "Greedy little pig!"

"You be still," Chadwick rejoined. "What if I do get a little drunk tonight? Who ever had a better reason? Just being married to you would be enough, I should think! I've got it coming to me."

"You've got a lot coming to you," Agatha shrilled. "And someday you're going to get it. If it hadn't been for you starting that fight up there . . ."

"Please," the infant Chadwick said, looking pained. "Try to restrain your shrewish tendencies just this once, won't you?" He turned to the liquor merchant with a bland smile. "Two bottles, if you please, friend."

"Yes," Toffee put in quickly, by way of ending the discussion. "Two bottles, if you please."

"Perhaps it's just as well," Agatha drawled. "I wouldn't drink from the same bottle with that little lush, anyway."

THE merchant made a brief, strangling noise as he tore his eyes away from Agatha and Chadwick and backed into a shelf, upsetting several bottles onto the floor. "I shouldn't of nipped the stock in the back room," he muttered to himself. "Me old lady warned me this would happen. She said it would start just this way." He turned

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

his back on Toffee and the infants, grasped the edge of the shelf and rested his head on the backs of his hands. A deep shudder ran the full length of his body. It was some time before he began to recover even a little bit.

Finally, without turning around, he managed to say, "What kind of whiskey did you want, lady?"

Toffee looked at Agatha and Chadwick questioningly.

"What kind have you got?" Agatha called out.

The merchant shuddered again. "I don't know," he whimpered. "I don't know nuthin' right now. Maybe this is all Chanel number 5 up here on these shelves. It wouldn't surprise me none. Why don't you just look around and take what you want? I won't look. You just take it and go away. Just tiptoe out and don't slam the door. That's all I ask. The liquor is on the house."

After the selection of two large, rather vaporish-looking bottles, the little company returned to the sidewalk. The babies, however, were becoming increasingly troublesome in their eagerness to be at the liquor, which was in Marc's custody for the time being. Their ill-tempered cries, however, were almost entirely directed at Toffee. People began to stop in the streets to watch and to listen. If they could believe their ears, they were overhearing two new-born infants calling their mother names that even an adult hadn't any right to know. Shocking invective gushed from the sweet mouths of the babes in a fountainous stream. Toffee, probably for the first time in her life, was embarrassed.

"Can't we do something?" she asked her companion. "Can't we go somewhere? If this sort of thing goes on much longer I'll be picked up by a home for wayward mothers or something."

Marc glanced down the street. Then he pointed. "Over there," he said. His finger indicated a public library. "There should be quiet and privacy in there." He turned to the babies. "Now listen here, you two, either you be quiet and behave yourselves or you won't get a drop. Understand?"

Agatha and Chadwick were instantly subdued.

The library was a large, high-ceilinged place of passages and corridors. Just inside the main entrance was a large foyer-like room out of the center of which, like a giant mushroom, jutted a circular checking counter. Toffee moved quickly to the counter and rested the babies on it. An aged woman whose spinsterish face belied her gay dress turned and smiled, revealing a mouth full of charred fags.

"Yes?" she asked.

"Where are the books?" Toffee asked.

"What books?"

Toffee looked puzzled for a moment. "Big books," she said. "In stacks. I was told there were veritable walls of books in here."

"And there are," the woman said defensively. "Which books are you interested in?"

"How should I know?" Toffee asked helplessly. "I haven't read them yet."

The woman sighed. Then her eyes fell to Agatha and Chadwick lying on the counter and they lighted with the fanatical gleam of frustrated motherhood. She reached out and pulled back the velvet folds.

"My, what beaut . . . !" The lie died in her throat. To suggest that Agatha and Chadwick were anything but downright ugly was too great a falsehood for even this child-starved soul. "You must be . . . uh . . . proud," she said tonelessly. However, she was game; once she'd started she wasn't

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

going to give up. She reached out a hand and waggled a finger over Agatha's protruding tummy.

"Kitchy-kitchy," she said unhappily.

Anger flashed in the infant's eyes. "Get your horny talons off me, you withered old wraith," she snapped. And having given warning, she parted her bubbling lips and bit the woman's finger.

THE woman didn't cry out in surprise; she didn't make any sound at all. She simply stared hard at Toffee for a long moment, then silently pointed to a distant corridor.

"The books on abnormal child psychology are in there," she whispered. "And if I were you, honey, I'd hurry."

Toffee gathered up Agatha and Chadwick and joined Marc and Mr. Culpepper, who had been watching from a distance.

"That was fine," she scolded Agatha. "That was a splendid display."

"What did you expect?" Agatha replied haughtily. "The old hag was thumbing me like a ripe watermelon."

"I wish she'd throttled you," Toffee said annoyedly. "Lord knows you deserve it. Your mothers must have been women of great forbearance. How they kept their hands off your little throats is more than I can tell."

The little party made its way through the nearest passage and found itself in a forest of books. Shelves lined on either side stretched out toward them like great, reaching fingers. Here and there a solitary "browser" was picking his way painfully along the long rows, title by title, but on the whole the great, book-jammed room was reasonably deserted. Toffee moved along the ends of the rows, found a browserless section and disappeared inside. Marc and Mr. Culpepper followed. Together, they all retreated to the end of the section and formed a sort of huddle. Marc produced the bottles from beneath his coat.

"How are we going to measure it?" Toffee asked. "We have to give them ten jiggers exactly."

"Do I have to think of everything?" Agatha inquired scornfully. Her small hand emerged from her velvet wrappings, clutching a jigger glass. "It was lying around loose on the counter," she explained.

"As in womanhood," Toffee said philosophically, "so, too, in infancy is she a crook."

As though in solemn ritual, the bottles were silently opened and the initial portion poured.

Agatha stretched out her miniature hand. "Gimme," she said. "It's my glass. And, boy, do I need a slug!"

"Tell me, dear," Toffee said quietly, tilting the glass to Agatha's eager mouth, "whatever became of that lovely accent of yours?"

Agatha polished off the whiskey and burped. "None of your damned business," she said with truly childish simplicity.

By alternating between the two babes, a certain amount of decorum was maintained. Marc took charge of the stoking of Chadwick while Toffee continued in behalf of Agatha. Mr. Culpepper shoved a few volumes aside on one of the lower shelves and seated himself, watching with interest as the glass moved from hand to hand to bottle to baby. He looked like a spectator at a tennis game being played on a checker board. The glass shuttled from pouted lip to pouted lip until the inner infant, on both scores, had been fortified five times over. From this point on, as the whiskey poured down the tiny throats, a corresponding amount of exuberance arose via the same channel. Agatha, made congenial by the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

liquor, began to while away the time between drinks by lifting her childish voice in song.

"Becky lived in a Turkish harem," she chortled. "She had towels but she wouldn't wear 'em."

"Stop that caterwauling," Toffee commanded.

Agatha perversely increased her volume. "Becky looked like Theda Barer," she shrieked. "Theda was bare but Becky was barer!"

SUDDENLY a sharp, gasping sound echoed around the little group, seeming to come from no place in particular; the bookshelves themselves appeared to be making little twittering sounds of surprise. The Pillsworth party froze as it was. Eyes moved furtively in unturning heads. It was Toffee who discovered the cause of the interruption.

Several books had been removed from one of the upper shelves, leaving a sort of peep hole into the next section. In this opening had appeared the forbidding face of the spinsterish librarian. It bore the dismayed expression of a maiden lady who had inadvertently stumbled into a YMCA swimming pool.

"Heavens!" the woman gasped. "Giving liquor to *babies!* No wonder they're retarded!"

Toffee, recognizing the situation for what it was, displayed what she believed was great presence of mind in grabbing the tell-tale bottle from the shelf and lifting it to her own lips. She drank deeply of the contents, and just to lend conviction to her performance as a ravening drunkard, staggered against the bookshelves, rolling her eyes loosely in their sockets.

"Oh, dear," Mr. Culpepper put in from the perch on the shelf. "If I were you, I don't think I'd . . ."

A little moan issued from the colorless face in the bookshelf. "Oooo, what depravity!" it exclaimed. "And teaching the babies to drink, too!"

"Nonsense," Toffee said, addressing the face openly. "We're drinking this ourselves. We're just a bunch of roaring sots. We're too stingy to give any to the babies."

"I saw you," the face insisted. "You were forcing the filthy stuff on those infants. You ought to be reported."

Toffee turned to Marc. "We weren't either, were we?" she asked. "We never give these babies any liquor, do we?"

"Certainly not," Marc said indignantly. "We were only fighting them off, trying to keep them from taking it away from us. We love the stuff too much to waste it on them."

In demonstration, he grabbed the bottle that had been Chadwick's and pressed it eagerly to his mouth, a fanatical gleam in his eye.

"Oh, really," Mr. Culpepper cried. "I really don't think . . ."

"You see," Toffee said to the face. "Can't leave the stuff alone. Those babies haven't got a look-in as far as liquor is concerned. We wouldn't give them a drop if they were dying of thirst."

Doubt came into the face as Marc withdrew the bottle from his lips with a loud smacking noise and grandly wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. The librarian was beginning to look more or less convinced. Slowly, the face started to move away.

"Becky's boy friend came and found her," Agatha suddenly shrilled in a voice that was definitely dewy. "But her towels were not . . ."

The voice suddenly became softly muffled, as though by velvet.

The face darted back into the opening between the books. "What was that?" it asked.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Me," Toffee said. "I like music with my liquor."

The face was some reassured. "Well, you'll have to stop it," it snapped. You'll have to stop almost everything you're doing, in fact, if you expect to remain here. Drinking is not allowed. . . ."

A loud, rumbling burp issued from the velvet bundle in Toffee's arms.

"Oh!" the face exclaimed, and suddenly disappeared. There was the sound of quick tapping footsteps on the other side of the shelf.

WHEN the footsteps had died away Toffee and Marc, with renewed vigor, returned to their labors with the bottles and the babies.

"We'll have to hurry," Marc said. "That old hag had a look about her that definitely meant trouble if you ask me."

"I agree," Toffee said. She glanced down at Agatha. "And you didn't help matters any. You displayed your customary perverseness, I noticed."

The baby cocked an insolent eye at her. "You acted with rare intelligence, yourself," she said. "In my opinion you handled the situation like a jerk. I only shudder that all these strangers are laboring under the degrading notion that you are my mother."

The liquor flowed with increasing velocity. The eighth jigger had been administered when the footsteps sounded in the doorway beyond the book shelves. They entered the room and hurried forward as though they knew just where they were going.

"In there!" came the voice of the aging librarian. "They're in section five, throwing a regular wild party! They're drinking liquor and singing dirty songs and . . . and . . . contributing to the delinquency of babies! They're carrying on 'till you wouldn't believe it!"

"My!" a voice said, not untinged with pleased expectancy. "Sounds like the time we raided that house over on the other side . . ."

"Shut up," another voice said. "No matter what's goin' on behind them books, this is different. And don't you forget it!"

The footsteps drew closer and swiftly rounded the end of the section. The members of the Pillsworth party looked up in unison and saw two large, blue-clad policemen running toward them.

Toffee fairly threw Agatha into the arms of Mr. Culpepper. "Here!" she said. "I'll hold them off. You see that she gets the other two shots!" She sounded like the little Dutch boy about to cram his pinky into that dyke over in Holland. Agatha landed in Mr. Culpepper's lap with a thud and a burp.

Thus relieved of her besotted burden Toffee raced quickly to a movable ladder stretched up against the long shelves. Reaching it, she started upward, two rungs at a time.

The ladder was the sort that rested on rollers at either end and could easily be shuttled from one location to another with a good deal of facility. Once aloft Toffee lost no time in using the contrivance to its utmost capacity. Rollers whirred and Toffee and the ladder sped forward to the attack, toward a section that was notable for the number of truly weighty volumes it housed. Toffee seized up the first of these volumes and paused momentarily to read its title.

"War and Peace," she read. "That ought to put them to sleep."

Never was literature so forced upon anyone as it was on the hapless policemen in the awful moments that followed. "War and Peace," true to Toffee's expectations did indeed leave the first of the cops looking extremely

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

drowsy as it clipped him on the chin and sent him staggering backwards against his companion. In a matter of seconds two of the city's finest were groveling pitifully on the floor, trying vainly to ward off a hail storm of books. Toffee, in selecting a lettered diet for these two besieged gentlemen showed a marked preference for the heavier works. Her victims were most impressed, in a very physical sort of way, with the works of the ancient Greeks.

The cops, apparently unwilling to perish under this literary avalanche, turned tail, and started crawling toward the outer protection of the shelves. Seeing that victory . . . at least momentary victory . . . was at hand, Toffee turned back to see what progress was being made with the howling Harpers. Everything at the end of the section was oddly serene.

AGATHA had been set aside on one of the shelves and apparently the last of the ten libations was being given to Chadwick. While Toffee was watching this picture of rather distorted domestic contentment, one of the cops timidly extended his head around the lower corner of one of the shelves.

"Lord," he commented to his companion, "they're choking whiskey down them young'uns like it was a matter of life and death. What do you suppose they wanna do that for?"

"Maybe they get a kick out of drunk babies," the other returned morosely. "Maybe hooched-up babies are a barrel of fun. How should I know?"

"Looks more like they're tryin' to kill 'em," said the peeping cop. "Infanticide is a serious charge. Attempted infanticide is just as bad. It's goin' to go hard on 'em when we get 'em outa there."

"*If* we get 'em outa there," his companion corrected. "Me, I feel almost like just crawlin' outa here and lettin' 'em do as they please."

"Shame on you, Murphy," the first cop said. "It's our duty to protect them babies, even if they don't look very human."

"What'll we do?"

The cop surveyed the situation; Toffee was now facing away from them, watching as Chadwick was being shelved beside Agatha.

"Now's our chance," he said. "Let's rush 'em."

"I wouldn't mind rushin' that redhead," Murphy said stoutly, "if I could just get out of the readin' room. She flings a mean book."

"Let's go," the first cop whispered. "No time to jaw."

Together, the policemen rushed once more onto the scene of their recent defeat. Somehow confused, they both ran headlong for Toffee and the ladder. Apparently neither remembered the swift mobility of the ladder for, simultaneously, they lunged at it, throwing their full weight against it.

Instantly the ladder shot into motion, fully burdened with the two startled cops and a thoroughly unbalanced Toffee. At the outset Toffee toppled from her perch, hurtled downward, and caught one of the cops around the neck just in time to prevent a crashing arrival at the floor. From there on, it was just one grand, piggy-back ride for the redhead. For the cop it was a matter of an extra burden and hanging on for dear life. Books, row upon row of them, flashed by in a screaming blurr. They were heading for a dead end with the speed of a bullet.

"Get off me!" Toffee's protector yelled ungallantly. "Beat it, lady! No riders!"

"Not on your life!" Toffee hollered back through clenched teeth. "For the rest of this trip you and I are sweet-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hearts!"

At this moment the librarian appeared at the end of the book littered aisle and gazed on the scene within with open amazement. "Just look at those cops!" she exclaimed. "Carrying on just as bad as the others! You'd think this was a fun house. You boys stop that this instant!" she yelled. "I'm going to call the commissioner!"

"When you do, lady," one of the policemen hollered back, "tell him for me what he can do with his lousy job! I got a wife and kids to think of!"

Just then, the ladder, like a transcontinental express, arrived at the end of the line and discharged its protesting passengers like three jet propelled missiles. The two policemen shot out into the air, headed directly for Marc and Mr. Culpepper who had been watching the little excursion in a state of rigid immobility. Toffee, through some hitherto undiscovered law of physics, left the back of her stalwart carrier in a sweeping upward arc that landed her ungently atop the book shelves.

THE law literally swept down on Marc and Mr. Culpepper, upending them posthaste and hurling them to the floor. From the top of the bookcase, Toffee collected her breath and gazed blandly on the scene of confusion below. She might have hurled a book or two in Marc's behalf, except that in the tangle of arms and legs, it was impossible to tell which were the property of Marc. Besides, she had just become happily aware of a window at her side, one that was easily accessible from the top of the book shelves. She threw the catch and it slid open.

Turning her attention back to the confusion on the floor, she was delighted to see that Marc and Mr. Culpepper had emerged from the "flail" and were dazedly looking about for some new, less hazardous enterprise.

"Up here!" Toffee yelled, pointing to the window. "Up the ladder!"

They reacted mechanically. They gazed dully at Toffee and the window, then started obediently toward the ladder. They were nearly to the top of the shelves when the two cops, finally weary of struggling with each other on the floor, got to their feet and observed these recent developments with considerable malice.

"Oh, no you don't!" one of them grated viciously. He lunged at the ladder and shoved it with all his might. As it shot away from his hand he let out a hysterical laugh. "There!" he yelled. "Now it's your turn to look silly!"

The ladder streaked away toward the open end of the section like a shrieking, avenging thing. Marc and Mr. Culpepper twined themselves to it and each other in a seizure of iron-bound desperation.

"Heh, heh, heh!" the cop cackled wildly, watching their terror. "That'll teach 'em to make light of the law!" He turned his attention to Toffee. "Come down off there, you little witch," he demanded.

"Come and get me, lardhead," Toffee hissed. "I'm holding out for squatter's rights."

The cop accepted her invitation. Or at least he tried. Clutching the edge of a high shelf he attempted to swing himself upward. From there on, the natural laws of gravity took matters into their own hands. The entire bookcase teetered drunkenly for a moment, swayed forward, paused, then clattered downward. Toffee's pursuer went down under a flood of literature, while Toffee sailed lightly outward and landed with ease in the outstretched arms of the other policeman. All three of the participants in this rather singular incident

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

were starkly surprised at its outcome.

At the same moment a howling duet of horror announced the arrival of Marc and Mr. Culpepper at their dreaded destination. There was a thud and a crash as the ladder hit the end of its track and hurled its helpless cargo into the wall. A clatter, a moan and a groan marked the end of the operation.

"Now look what you've done!" Toffee howled as the cop lowered her to the floor. "You've probably killed them!"

A howl of outrage issued from the mountain of books at her side. A few slid from the top of the pile and the head of the deluged policeman jutted into view, eyes ablaze. "You haven't increased my insurance value either, sister," he said bitterly. He burrowed his way to freedom and gained his feet, staring evilly at the diminutive cause of his downfall. "I—hate—you," he said with heavy emphasis.

BY THE time Toffee and the cops arrived at the end of the section, Marc and Mr. Culpepper were just beginning to stir. Apparently their nervous systems had suffered the bulk of the damage, for they were not noticeably marked. The cops took them into hand.

"Fun's over boys!" the more unruffled of them said. "You won't go skylarking again for a long, long time."

In the meantime, Toffee was staring back into the aisle, searching out the shelf on which she had last seen the infant Harpers. She made a little cry of surprise. The shelf was empty.

"They're gone!" she said. "They've gotten away. And after all the trouble we've gone through to bring those two crooks to justice!" A look of speculation crept into her eyes, and she turned to the nearest cop. She grabbed his arm with an urgent hand. "My babies!" she wailed dramatically. "My babies! They're gone. You've got to find them! You've got to! I'll kill myself!"

"What's that?" the cop asked mildly.

"I'll kill myself, Dumbo," Toffee said sourly. "Go get my babies. They've run away."

"I don't blame 'em. Where did they go?"

"How should I know?"

"Kill yourself, lady," the cop said tiredly. "I'm too worn out."

"Why you . . . !" Toffee started.

A sudden shriek from the foyer interrupted her. It was a scream with a purpose in life, it was ambitious, it was soul searing and nerve shattering.

In a body, the cops and the apprehended fugitives ran to the doorway. Then they stopped, completely stunned by the spectacle before them.

Two lank and very mature figures, clothed only to the essential degree in brief scraps of black velvet, were crawling serenely across the foyer floor. The ancient librarian, holding onto her counter to keep from slipping to the floor, was screaming her dreadful head off. The Harpers, apparently in the midst of escape, had suddenly and quite unbeknownst to themselves been restored to adulthood. At each movement the velvet wrappings were slipping a bit further afield. A number of people, some with books in their hands, were standing about the room in attitudes of fascinated bewilderment.

Beyond the apparent chronological transformation, even stranger changes had been wrought in the Harpers. Their faces were no longer the works of art that they had previously been. Agatha was definitely moon faced, in a wall-eyed, colorless sort of way, and Chadwick's handsome features appeared suddenly to have been run over by a steam roller.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Holy gee!" one of the cops breathed, recovering from the first shock of surprise. "It's the homicidal Harpers!"

"What a catch!" his companion exclaimed excitedly. "We'll both get promoted, sure. Agnes and Chester Harper! They're wanted for things that ain't even got a name yet . . . in five continents!"

In light of this sensational development, the ambitious policemen hastily abandoned their captives and started in pursuit of the Harpers.

Agatha and Chadwick, at the sound of running footsteps, glanced up, caught glimpses of each other and became instantly animated. Springing quickly to their feet, they frantically clutched their brief coverings to them where they would do the most good, and started to run, their bare feet slapping dully against the tiled floor. They raced through the entrance and out onto the sidewalk, the policemen in hot pursuit.

At the other end of the room Toffee plucked urgently at the sleeves of Marc and Mr. Culpepper.

"Why hang around?" she asked, motioning them back toward the bookshelves. "Follow me, men."

THE three of them raced back to the aisle from which they had been so rudely ejected only a few moments before. They shoved the ladder to the far wall and hastily climbed toward the window. The window wasn't so accessible as it had been before the pillaging of the end bookcase, but they managed to reach it without too much difficulty.

Outside, the trio found themselves in a dead-end alley which was pleasantly bathed in bright moonlight. They did not tarry, however, to enjoy the scenery. Immediately upon hitting the pavement, Mr. Culpepper streaked out toward the sidewalk, and Marc and Toffee started out after him at a dead run.

Then something happened.

Ahead, they could see Mr. Culpepper skittering swiftly around the corner. Accordingly, it was only logical that they should be in the close vicinity of the little man's flashing heels. But they were not. Their own progress, unlike Mr. Culpepper's, suddenly lacked something in get-up-and-go.

Their steps definitely lagged, and their breath came to them in rasping gasps. As they ran, they turned questionably to each other. Toffee screamed and stopped dead in her tracks. Marc came to a halt only a few steps distant. They gazed at each other in horror.

All at once, they had become nothing more than a couple of doddering old wrecks. Toffee, no longer a voluptuous young redhead, was now a withered, greyheaded hag. And Marc's transformation was no less startling, his clothes were hanging loosely over a shriveled frame that was noticeably hunched in the back. Both their faces were networked with wrinkles, and their eyes were dull with age. All of a sudden they had become old . . . very old.

They stared at each other in silent bewilderment, too stunned to speak.

In this dramatic moment, footsteps thundered in the mouth of the alley, and the two policemen appeared, running toward them. The first to reach them, grabbed Toffee roughly by the arm.

"So!" he cried triumphantly. "Got yuh! Thought you'd pull a sneak, eh?"

"Hey!" the other cop yelled, arriving on the scene. "That ain't them!"

Toffee glanced quickly at Marc, then back at the cops. "Take your hands off me, young man," she cried indignantly. "Have you no respect for old age?"

"Gee, sorry, mother," the policeman said apologetically. "We thought you

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was someone else. Did you see a young couple with some babies runnin' down here?"

Marc shook his head. "Not a soul," he said.

The cops backed away, looking thoughtful.

"Say," one of them said, a note of suspicion in his voice. "What are you two doin' down here at this time of night?"

Toffee giggled coyly. "Why officer!" she exclaimed. "What a question!"

The cop looked shocked. "You're kiddin'," he murmured.

"It's our fiftieth anniversary," Toffee lied smoothly. "And right here, on this very spot, is where we first met. We thought it would be nice if we came back tonight." She reached out and patted Marc's hand with a pretty show of sentiment. "And it was, too, wasn't it, lover?" she asked.

"You two met in an alley?" the cop said, scandalized.

"Of course not," Marc put in quickly. "This was a park here in those days. Now, would you mind leaving us alone?"

"You'd better not stay here," the cop said. "These people we're looking for are still at large and they're clean outa their heads. You'd better go on home."

MARC and Toffee, accompanied by the cops, proceeded to the sidewalk, helping each other along in their sudden senility. They tottered up to the police car that was parked in front of the library and peered interestedly inside. Nearsightedly, they made out Agatha and Chadwick, sitting in the inner dimness, handcuffed to the door handles.

"What vile looking people!" Toffee exclaimed elegantly. "How vulgar. I abhor vulgarity, don't you, lover?"

"Indeed," Marc said primly. "Indeed I do, sweetheart."

Agatha's scowling countenance instantly appeared at the window. The woman opened her mouth to say something, then, at the sight of the aged couple, changed her mind. A suspicion of something too fantastic to believe flickered briefly in her eyes, then disappeared in a flood of doubt.

"Couldn't be," she murmured, sinking back into the dark reaches of the car. "But oh! how I wish it was!"

"What a disagreeable looking creature!" Toffee said. She turned pleasantly to the policemen who were standing proudly at her side. "See that they get everything that's coming to them, won't you, boys?"

"Yes, mam," the cops chorused. "We sure will."

Agatha's face reappeared in the window. "Say . . . !" she started hotly.

"Come, lover," Toffee said, turning to Marc. "Don't you think we should look for more refined company?"

As they started down the sidewalk, Toffee turned back and waved daintily to the two policemen.

"Goodnight, gentlemen!" she called.

"Gee," one of the cops said. "What a sweet old dame. It's sure a shame they got the wrong street."

"What do you mean?" the other cop asked.

"That alley they were in," the first cop said. "There wasn't no park there in the old days. There wasn't nothin' but a pickle factory. My old man used to work there." He sighed. "I didn't want to tell 'em . . . might of spoiled their evening, you know."

FOR the enfeebled couple it was a long, tortuous climb to the fourth floor and to Marc's office. When they finally made it, they both collapsed into chairs and regarded each other bleakly.

"This is worse than being children,"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Toffee wheezed. "I could die."

"You may," Marc said morosely. "We've got one foot in the grave already. Anyway," he went on, "Agatha and Chadwick are taken care of."

"It hardly seems worth it," Toffee said, "when things turns out this way. No matter what punishment they get, it'll never be as bad as what's happened to us."

They both sat up as the door to the outer office whined open and slammed to. Footsteps rattled through the silence, and then the door to Marc's office edged open to make way for a small, ferret-like face.

"There he is," Toffee said. "The cause of it all. If I had the strength I'd strangle the little devil with my own two hands.

Mr. Culpepper looked at them with interest. "I was afraid this would happen," he said brightly. "I tried to warn you not to drink any more liquor, but you wouldn't listen. Now your chemical action has been reversed. If you'd only waited twenty-four hours you'd have been all right." He shoved the door open and stepped inside. "My!" he murmured, patting dust from his clothes. "I certainly had to run to get away from those cops. Why didn't you follow me?"

"We didn't have to," Toffee replied. "Thanks to you, there isn't a soul in the world who would recognize us."

"Yes, yes," Mr. Culpepper said, smiling. "We'll fix that up right away. I have it all worked out. If you take the original dose of two pills you should return to what you were before you grew old. And there shouldn't be any permanent after-effects."

"No!" Marc said. With a palsied hand he boosted his wasted frame out of the chair. "No more of those pills. Heaven only knows what they might do next."

"It could hardly be worse than what they've already done," Toffee said. "And besides, I won't stay this way for the rest of my life . . . what little there is left of it. You'll take those pills if I have to fire them down your throat with a gun."

There were several heated exchanges before Marc finally gave in.

"Oh, all right," he said at last. "At this point I really don't care what happens anyway."

"The reaction will be faster this time," Mr. Culpepper said. "But don't be alarmed. "Everything will be all right." He plucked two pills from the littered desk and handed them to Marc.

Marc frowned at the pellets for a long time. Then, saying, "Here goes everything," he popped them into his mouth. He turned to Toffee. "If we wind up in our infancy again, I'll . . ."

Suddenly he stopped; already Toffee's image was blurring before him. The blackness was closing in fast this time. The room seemed to whirl. Round and round it went, then it stopped with a jerk. But Marc didn't. He went sailing off into space . . . into unbroken blackness . . .

TOFFEE gently removed her lips from Marc's and gazed at the quiet valley through half-closed lids. Folding her hands beneath her head, she lay back on the mossy grass. They were resting on the topmost point of the sloping knoll.

"You know," Toffee mused. "I'm actually a little glad to be back here this time. That business with the pills was rather fatiguing; we kept being such unattractive things. Oh, it was lovely being with you again, but here, in the valley of your subconscious, I can at least count on being what I am."

"I wonder," Marc said, "what age I'll be when I get back."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Oh, you'll be back to normal, I'm sure," Toffee said. "When you stop to think about it, it should work out just as Mr. Culpepper said."

"Then I'll probably be dragged off by the cops the minute I show my face."

"Oh, I don't think so. No one really ever got a very good look at you. After the cops showed up, we were in the shadows most of the time and moving too fast. Besides they'll be looking for a couple with children."

Marc shrugged. "Maybe you're right." He sighed and stretched out on the grass at Toffee's side. "It's really very restful here," he said.

No sooner were the words out of his mouth than it happened, the earth began to rock beneath them. The little valley was seized by a spasm, it lurched crazily from side to side in an erratic see-saw motion. Marc dug his fingers into the grass, but it didn't help; in a moment he was rolling swiftly down the side of the knoll, heading into a thick bank of blue mist. Behind him he could hear Toffee calling to him, but her words were muffled and unintelligible though her tone was cheerful and unworried.

And then the mist closed over him, turned into fog and became dense and black.

SOMEONE was shaking Marc's shoulder when he opened his eyes, and he looked up into the anxious face of Mr. Culpepper.

"The girl!" Mr. Culpepper was crying. "Gone! Entirely gone. I didn't see her take any of the pills, but she's gone!"

Marc gazed dazedly around the room, heard himself echoing the word "gone."

"I didn't mean to do anything like this!" Mr. Culpepper wailed. "I didn't mean to destroy anyone."

To Marc, the room and his thoughts became clear in the same moment. He gazed at Mr. Culpepper's anguished face and smiled. Perhaps the little man deserved the remorse he was feeling; perhaps it was his just payment for tampering too much with the natural order of things. Still . . .

"I'm sure she's all right," Marc said. "She probably just wandered out when you weren't looking. She often does. Sometimes she just drifts away for whole months at a time. I wouldn't worry about it."

The little man looked up, smiled with relief. "She's so pretty," he said. "She's an awful heller but she's such a pretty one."

* * *

Two days later Marc was sitting at his desk, going through the morning mail, when Memphis opened the door and came in.

"The boys are here," she said.

"Boys?" Marc asked, looking up.

"You know. The applicants for the messenger boy job. There are several waiting. Shall I send them in?"

Marc dropped the letter in his hand and gazed absently out the window. "Oh, all right," he said. "Run them through."

Memphis left the room. A moment later there was a tap at the door.

"Come in!" Marc called without turning.

The door opened and footsteps moved into the room. There was a long moment of silence and then a throat anxiously cleared itself nearby. Marc turned around. A small boy, about twelve, regarded him from the other side of the desk . . . a small boy with eager eyes and a hawk-featured face.

"Culpepper!" Marc yelled.

The boy twisted his cap nervously.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Yes," he said. "It's me, Mr. Pillsworth. Your secretary kept throwing me out."

"I told her to."

The boyish Culpepper nodded. "That's why I took the pills. It was the only way I could get in."

"There are several ways you can get out," Marc said menacingly. "One of them is with a broken neck."

Mr. Culpepper started waving his small hands. "You must listen to me, Mr. Pillsworth. I have something sensational to show you. You remember we were talking about something that would make people immortal? Well . . ." He paused to fish a small green bottle out of his pocket. "Well . . ."

"Out!" Marc was on his feet, yelling. "Out! OUT!"

The boy's eyes widened with alarm. He turned and scurried for the door like a frightened rat.

"Don't!" he shrieked. "Don't throw that paper weight, Mr. Pillsworth! I'm leaving, Mr. Pillsworth! I'm *leaving!*" He scooted through the door and slammed it after him.

Marc replaced the paper weight on the desk and sank back into his chair. For a long time he just sat there, staring blankly across the room. Then, slowly, a smile crept into his face.

Somewhere in the back of his mind there was laughter.

THE END

SQUEEZE PLAY

☆ By William Karney ☆

WITH the tremendous amount of research being done on supersonic flight, on rocketry and on guided missiles, more and more the aerodynamicist's laboratory, the wind-tunnel, is assuming a position of importance. Wind-tunnels for conventional research on the usual type of airplane have been nothing more than gigantic electric fans.

Air can be given a speed of over six hundred miles per hour with the largest of these machines and this more than suffices for conventional research. But rockets and supersonic planes are not conventional. They are designed for the most part to exceed the speed of sound. Since the models which determine largely how the rockets will be construed, are mounted still in the wind-tunnel and the air is hurled past them, it is at once clear that some way must be found for shooting air past them at as much as Mach number two and three or even greater. (Mach number one being the speed of sound, about seven hundred and fifty miles per hour.)

Gigantic air compressors driven by electric motors store up vast quantities of air under tremendous pressures in metal storage tanks. (The propeller wind tunnel fails because the fan blades disrupt the air and tear themselves apart.) This air is then released through a Venturi tube in which the model is placed.

Of course the suddenly released air tears past the model at a terrific rate. And because the throat of the Venturi tube can be expanded or constricted, the velocity of the escaping air can be controlled. Narrow constriction—high velocity—broad constriction—low velocity.

With apparatus like this it is possible to study the effects of such speeds on the models. Schlieron photographs are made of the air flow past the model, shock waves are caught in action, and the design of the model can be easily checked. Of course there are many other ways of giving models velocity tests. At the Navy's rocket testing ground, a long railroad track serves as a road bed for a rocket driven car. Here models may be placed on the car, cameras attached to the car, and the whole hurled down the track at enormous speeds. This, however, is a cruder and less effective method of study than the wind-tunnel.

A few important facts are coming out of this study. For one thing, in supersonic planes which have wings because they must rely on air "lift" for the beginning of the flight, the wings should be swept back to avoid encountering the shock waves and to enable them to slice through any shock waves they do run up against. Whenever an object is propelled through the air at a speed greater than sound it sets up before it a wave in the air which travels with it at a terrific rate. This wave is a highly compressed layer of air that is capable of tearing the plane or rocket to bits just as surely as if it were a brick wall. The worst time the shock wave acts is during the transition from below the speed of sound to above it. It is here that its most damaging effects occur. It is important, therefore, to know how to avoid shock waves.

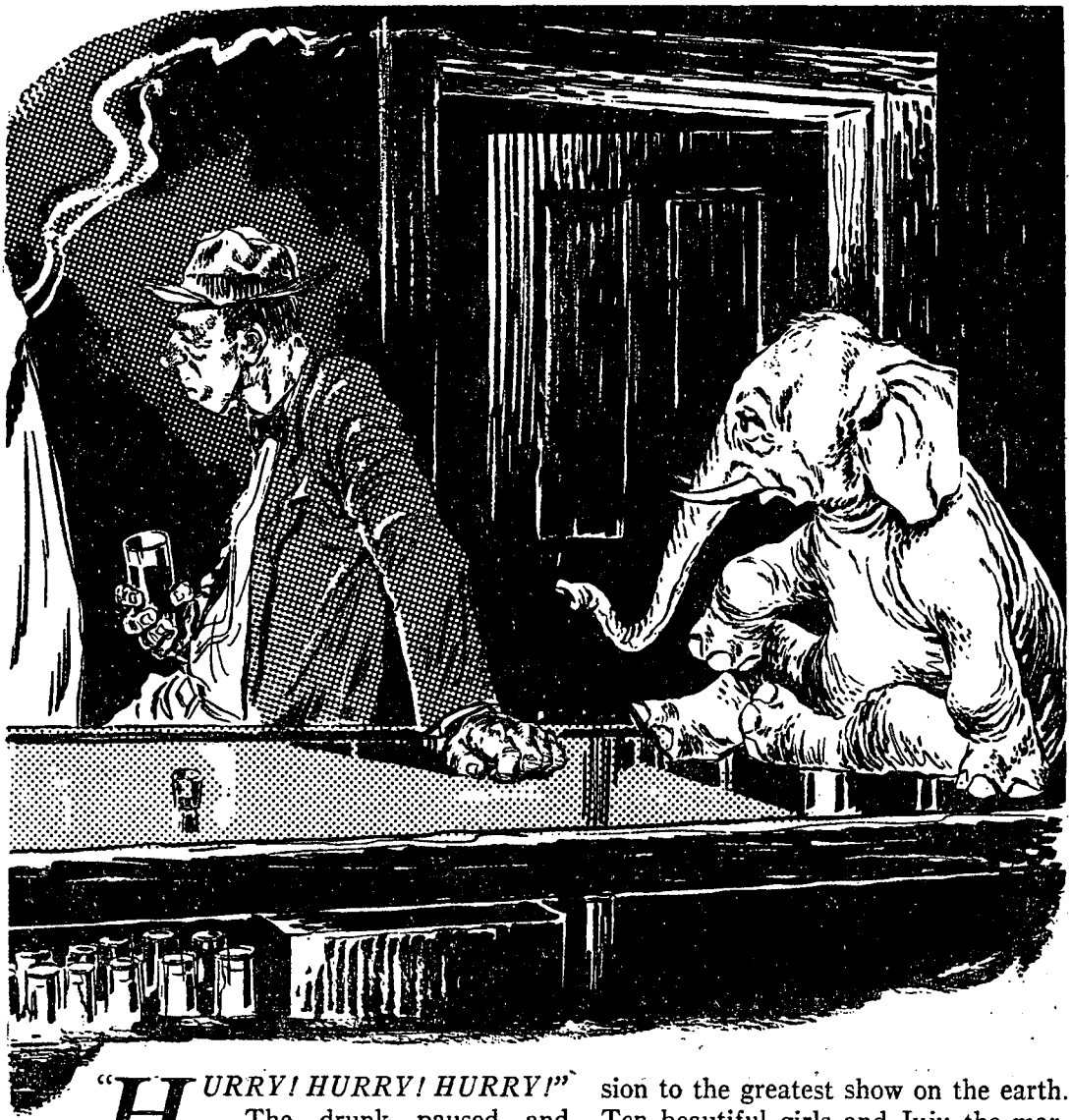
PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

PINK HUMANS Aren't Real!

by EDGAR POLK

You've heard about the drunk who saw pink elephants?—Well meet Rhadamanthus, a sober little elephant who saw pink humans!

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



"*HURRY! HURRY! HURRY!*" The drunk paused and peered through bright, unseeing eyes at the barker on the stand. The crowd ebbed all about the drunk. A loose-lipped grin was born on the drunk's mouth. He staggered closer and weaved on uncertain legs before the gaudy stand on which the barker stood.

"Hurry! Hurry! It's never off, it's never over," the barker cajoled in hoarse-voiced entreaty. "Ten cents, the tenth part of a dollar. The little deemer buys you the price of admission to the greatest show on the earth. Ten beautiful girls and Juju the marvelous elephant. Don't miss it! Juju will answer any and all questions. It's better than the Quiz Kids! More information than Information Please! And Juju never misses. Hurry! Hurry! Hurry!"

The drunk's name was George. He was a small man, a strangely neat man. His pepper and salt suit sat well on his small-boned compact little frame. And there was something distinguished about his regular features, the short straight nose, the angled cheekbones,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the stubborn, out-thrust chin. Yes, there was something distinguished in the face. Until one saw the wispy mustache, mouse-colored, its untrimmed hairs straggling over the lips, up the nostrils, in every which way except the one that was expected of a mustache on such a distinguished upper lip.

George had a single all-consuming passion, whiskey. And singularly enough, George held a position of trust and responsibility. It was rather surprising to the members of his coterie that George was *able* to hold such a position. For it was obvious to all that George spent the greater part of his working hours bending his right elbow over the bar of Piggy Move-Up's place.

What they didn't know, was that Watson Fleming, the president of Fleming's Agency, the most prosperous advertising agency in town, and in which George was employed as a copy-writer, would as soon have fired George as cut off his right hand, the one which clipped his bond coupons.

There were several reasons for this, the oddest being that Fleming held George in awe for a reason that dated back to their undergraduate days in "dear old Princeton." For there, George, whose last name was Nesbitt, had been the shining light in the famous course presided over by Conant, and which dealt with play-writing. Conant had once said of George, "There is no question in my mind that George Nesbitt has more native ability than all of our present day crop of playwrights put together."

Watson Fleming too, had the desire to write plays, but the best of his efforts had only produced an imitation of "Desire Under the Elms." This in the days of "Front Page." So because of Watson's admiration for George, he had placed him on a literary pedestal. More, he avowed lifelong friendship and had promised George a position in his father's agency if and when George would so desire it.

But the great promise George had shown died before it could reach fruition. The under-graduate body would visit New York *en masse* for the purpose of getting drunk; Nassau going out to get nausea. George had neither the money nor the inclination for these trips. But Watson Fleming had both. So he would drag George along. George had his first fling at peeking through the peep-hole of a blind pig. And his first taste of whiskey. He liked both, particularly the stimulation of whiskey. He never lost his taste for it. The theatre, his ambition to write for it, everything, was forgotten. He had found a new career, to be the town drunk. There was no question about his having succeeded.

So when George came into the Fleming Agency and reminded Watson about that long-ago promise, Watson, seeing his debauched condition, felt an odd stirring of pity for the little fellow. And thinking hard, thought of a place among the copy-writers where George might be of use. George had been more than of use. He had been the hottest thing ever to hit the agency, his copy selling more advertising than any other man's.

But the strangest thing was that George still remained the town drunk.

GEORGE swayed on rubbery legs and gaped at the barker in open-mouthed admiration. Never had he heard such a flow of language. A small boy edged up to the stand and began to irritate the barker with childish questions.

"Hurry! Hurry! . . . *G 'way son, y' bother me* . . . It's never off. . . . *Beat it! You're breaking up the tip!* . . . Only ten . . . *Scram before I wrap this cane around that skinny little neck*

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of yours!"

George swayed up to the pretty cashier, paid his dime, and entered the dimly lit tent. Even if the tent had been properly lighted, he couldn't have seen much in his condition. But he knew by the odors that there were others there. It was a hot August afternoon and the canvas enclosure held within it the effluvia of the hundreds who had already seen the *show*. Outside, the barker continued his spiel, while the tent slowly filled with the curious.

George was wedged between a woman who, by the bundles she carried, had stopped off at the carnival between shopping, and another woman who muttered in a low undertone, that, "It's a cryin' shame to let children in to see somethin' like this."

He shoved his way past the two and up to the rail which guarded the people from a platform a few feet in front. The platform was projected some ten feet above the floor so that they were forced to look up to see what went on. George no longer heard the barker's voice from the outside. Instead there came the *flap* of the canvas door's closing and the barker calling to some one named, Joe, to "Get Anne on."

Quite suddenly the platform was lighted by hidden lights from above and below. Then the barker appeared on the boards. Somehow, here on the platform, his clothes showed their garish, extreme cut. He wore a close-fitting suit with a broad pattern of wide stripes. He stepped to the front of the platform, lifted his hands to gain the audience's attention, and went into a new spiel:

"Ladies and gentlemen. As an added feature, a feature that no other show on the midway gives, we take pleasure in presenting . . . Joan!"

There was scattered applause for Joan, though no one had ever seen her. Once more the barker lifted his hands enforcing another silence.

"Joan will dance for your entertainment, and for the small added fee of ten cents . . ."

With the last word the lights dimmed and a girl appeared from the wings to the right. Pale purple baby spots picked up her entrance from three sides, so that she seemed bathed in a purple glow. But the front of her body could be seen only dimly. It was enough to bring exclamations of delight from the men and murmurs of disapproval from the women. Her costume consisted of a net bra that was flesh-colored, a long blond wig, and a filmy girdle about her nude waist. She was a woman no longer in the first flush of youth, in fact from the saggy, lumpy appearance she made, it was patent that many years had passed since her childhood. She stood before them, one hip stuck out, resting on her tired arches and waited for the barker's next words. He flashed a gold-bridged grin at her, then turned to the audience and said: "As I was saying, Joan is famous for a special dance she can do. For the price of one thin dime, if you'll just step this way . . ."

"Jush a minute," a voice piped up. It was George.

The barker said, "Yes?"

"The elephant. Wanta shee the elephant," George said.

"F'r those who want to see Juju, the educated elephant, my assistant will take over now."

Nothing was mentioned of the "ten beautiful girls." Two boys, each about ten, kept George company. In a few seconds the man called, Joe appeared on the platform. And with him came a pygmy elephant. The assistant was younger, not so old in the ways of the carnival. The lights had flashed bright again on his entrance. He led the ele-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

phant around until its trunk hung over the very edge of the platform. Then he left to return in a short while bearing a large slate and a small square table. He set the table down and put the slate on it, so that the dull surface faced the three watching him.

"And now, ladies and gentlemen," Joe said, as if he were facing an audience composed of such, "Juju, the educated elephant. Juju can add, subtract and answer any question you can put to him."

GEORGE hadn't heard a word he'd said. His eyes had grown large and filled with wonder at his first sight of the pygmy elephant.

"Rhadamanthus!" George had almost shouted. "He's really alive. I knew it."

In the meantime, Joe had gone into his act. From his trouser pocket he produced a jointed pointer which he telescoped out and handed to the elephant who wrapped his trunk about it.

"Now Juju," Joe began, "let's start with arithmetic problems. How much is one and one?"

The elephant threw Joe a bored glance from his beady eyes and lifted his trunk high in the air. It descended slowly to the table and tapped twice upon it.

"That's right, Juju, two. And how much is one from one?"

Again the trunk lifted on high and descended once more. Only this time the ruler landed across Joe's shoulders. Joe mimicked pain and cried:

"I'm sorry, Juju. I guess I'm a dope. Y' can't get anything from one and one."

The two boys squealed in laughter. But George was silent. And no longer drunk. He followed each move of the elephant with an intensity that was ludicrous. His face twitched and his feet shuffled as if there was nothing in the world he wanted more to do than get up there on the platform with the elephant.

Then Joe put him through his other paces.

"Now then, Juju. Tell the audience how much three times two is."

Six times the pointer descended on the table's top.

"Ver-y good," Joe intoned. "Let's try something else now, eh, Juju?"

The elephant's trunk shook up and down affirmatively.

"I'm going to ask you several questions about history, Juju. I want you to tell me who was the first president. Lincoln?"

The elephant looked bored.

"Jefferson?"

The bored look was still there.

"Washington?"

The pointer descended with a crash.

"That's right, Juju. For that, there'll be another bushel of peanuts. And that ain't hay. Ha. Ha."

The elephant did a sort of shuffle at the words.

"Later, Juju, later. When we get enough dough for a fan," Joe said. "And now, ladies and gentlemen, Juju will perform the most remarkable feat in the history of the carnival. Juju will *write* the answers on this slate you see set up on the table."

Again Joe dipped into the trouser pocket. This time he brought out a large piece of chalk. It was remarkable how the rough skin of the elephant's trunk was able to grasp the brittle piece of chalk without damaging it in any way.

"Now think hard, Juju. Tell the audience how much is ten times ten."

The trunk passed over the slate's surface, leaving chalk marks behind.

"There you are, ladies and gentlemen, your answer, one hundred."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It was true. The number, 100, was plain to be seen on the slate.

The show was over. Joe began to gather up the paraphernalia used in the act. The two boys, their mouths open, looked at each other, broke into giggles and ran from the tent. But George remained. He was no longer drunk. In fact he hadn't been drunk since the elephant's entrance.

"Jush a minute, fella," George said, his words still blurred a trifle as though they were still under the control of whiskey.

"That's all, brother," Joe said as he lifted the table and slate and put them under his arms.

"Jush a minute," George said more firmly.

"Okay, lush. What's wrong?" Joe asked.

"I wanta buy that elepun-elephant," George said.

Joe let the table and slate drop to the platform.

"Say that again," he said.

George did.

Joe put his hands on his hips and stared hard at George. His head shook from side to side as though he couldn't believe his ears.

"All sorts of wacky characters I seen. But you take the furlined cake, brother," Joe said. "And if you don't mind my askin', what are you goin' to do with him?"

George had a single track mind. All he wanted to do was buy the elephant, not answer questions. That was the elephant's business.

"I wanta buy the elephant," he said again.

JOE looked up to the tent-top and said in words of awe, "The guy's levelin'." Then to George, "Sorry, bud. But I don't own Juju. I just work with him. But I'll tell you what. Stick around until the tip breaks and I'll tell Eddie the boss. Wait outside by the cashier."

If Joe had noticed that George had not looked at him all the while they discussed the elephant's sale, he had passed it over as being due to George's condition. But it was a strange thing that the elephant which usually walked off the platform at the end of the performance, stayed while they talked. And he and George had exchanged hidden looks. It was as if they were in some sort of silent communication. George nodded vehemently at Joe's last words. But the nod was directed toward Juju. Softly, so softly only the elephant heard, George said, "Later, Rhadamanthus. I'll see you later."

The cashier was putting fresh lipstick on lips already the color of fresh-spilled blood. She was bored with carnival life and dreamed of the old days when she had been a pony at Pinsky's burlesque in New York, and wished she were back there instead of having to follow Eddie, her husband, around the jerk towns of the carnival circuit. She looked down at George, who had taken up his station in front of her booth, as Joe had directed, and was waiting for Eddie's appearance.

"From characterland," she thought. She had fallen into the habit of studying the people who visited their exhibit. "But f'r sure! Nice little guy, though, on second look. That hay on his lip needs a trimmin' awful bad. Don't need a toothpick on cold days with that thing hangin' on his mouth. Wonder what he's waitin' for? If it's f'r me, kid, some other time. H'm. Awfully excited about somethin'. Gees! Hope he ain't the town law. I bet he is! Darn! I told Eddie that that stripper'd only get us in a jam. That old bag! Makin' hips at my old man . . ."

George was beginning to feel the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

need of a little stimulation. The terrific urge to buy Juju was still present, but his courage was passing fast with each minute that Eddie delayed his arrival. He knew that the first of the afternoon clique was already at Piggy's. His mouth felt cottony. He was torn between two desires. But the greater won. He had to buy Juju.

Eddie appeared finally. He walked up to the cashier and stood beside her booth, not saying anything. The girl inclined her head and said, "How was it honey, good?"

"So-so," he said, not looking at her.

"Only so-so. I thought she was better'n that."

His eyes narrowed and his lips tightened. Words trembled on his lips, and George made his appearance.

"Shay," George began, "the guy in there tellsh me that you're the man that owns the elephant."

"So?"

"Sho? I wanta buy him. That's sho. I mean what."

"Scram, lushy. I'm busy now."

George settled himself firmly in front of the two. At least it was a good try. But he still wabbled somewhat.

"Too bushy for bushiness?" George persisted.

FOR the first time Eddie looked at George. His shrewd little eyes made a careful appraisal of the little man, saw the expensive suit he was wearing, the air of odd determination on his face, and changed his tone.

"Never too busy for that, friend," he said. "What's on your mind?"

"I shaid I wanta buy the elephant.

George's tone was patient, as though he were addressing a backward child. "How much do you want for him?"

"Well, now, I'd say it'd be pretty hard to make a snap decision as to how much Juju'd be worth," Eddie said, adopting a judicious manner.

His wife, on the other hand, had her own opinion of that.

"Eddie Sims!" She was so excited she came down from the booth and took her place at his side. "Are you nuts or somethin'? Juju's our bread and butter. You can't sell him."

"Look, honey," Eddie said out of the side of his mouth. He kept his eyes hard on George's. "That animal eats too much. 'Sides, I got other ideas."

"Well if they have to do with that bag . . ."

"Shut up!" the barker said quietly. She did. "How much you offerin'?" he asked.

That sobered George up. It was a peculiar feeling, being sober. And somehow not to his liking. Whiskey gave him a certain kind of courage.

"How mush . . . well. I don't know. What are elephants worth these days?"

"This one's worth three grand," Eddie said pointedly.

"Three grand?"

"Yeah. Three thousand dollars."

"But I don't have three thousand dollars."

"How much you got?"

George did some mental arithmetic. An expression of pain came into his eyes. His mustache developed a more decided droop. In fact the whole small body lost its erectness.

"No," he said hesitantly. "I—I don't have that much."

"Well, *how much?*" Eddie asked in desperation.

"Two hundred and ten dollars," George said sadly. "And eighty cents," he added, as he fished some change from his pocket.

Eddie let his breath out slowly. He hadn't expected to see three thousand dollars. Neither had he expected to hear what he did. He knew that was all the money the little man had. It was to

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

be seen in the little fellow's apologetic manner.

"Let me tell you something, mister," Eddie said. "For about a sawbuck you can get yourself plastered enough to see all the elephants you want, any color, any size. So . . ."

"But that's just it," George broke in. "I've seen him that way. I mean . . ."

A great light dawned on Eddie. The little guy was drunk but not like any drunk he'd seen before. This guy saw them even when he was sober. No. That couldn't be. How could he see them when he was sober?

Suddenly Eddie was very angry. This guy was having fun with him. Well, he'd show him! Before George knew what was happening Eddie had him by the slack of his trousers and was giving him a fast boost toward the gate. Accompanying them was Eddie's wife whose voice was raised in warning and remonstrance:

"Eddie, please. Be careful. Don't let him hurt you. Eddie! Watch for the law."

George staggered, recovered his balance and looked back to where the barker and his wife, who was still talking, walked back to their exhibit.

"Oh dear!" George groaned aloud. "Now what'll I do?"

There wasn't much for him to do except go back to Piggy's, he realized. Perhaps some of his friends might have ideas on the subject.

PIGGY MOVE-UP'S was on N street, next to the bank. Piggy's real name was Antonio Movoppo, that was the how of Move-Up. As for the Piggy part, Antonio looked like a little, fat pig, only a bit cleaner. Piggy had the best clientele in town, what with the proximity of his place to the bank and also because somehow or other the more literate people in town gravitated to it. It was among these that George held a somewhat peculiar position.

In the early days, when Fleming had been wont to show George around, and before he became aware of George's overweening fondness for whiskey, Fleming's friends had more or less accepted George as one of them. But because most of them were snobs, George had seen through them and had chosen his own friends. And it was to these friends that George came for advice.

They were lined up at the back of the bar, three men in various stages of inebriation.

The tallest one of the three spotted George first.

"Georgie boy," he shouted, drawing all eyes to the little man who had just come in.

"Hiya Fred," George said sadly.

"A little rye for our little friend," Fred said to the bartender.

George stared with moody intent into the dark liquor. The bright words flowed around and about him, but he didn't hear them. He was seeing in his mind's eye, a pygmy elephant named Juju. And no words could take that thought from him.

Soon it became apparent to his friends that something was wrong. Never had they seen George wait upon a glass of whiskey. The talk died and they stared in silence at the little man.

"Something wrong, George?" a thick-shouldered, florid faced man asked.

"No," George said, sighing a bit.

"Sure there's something wrong," Fred said. "Can't you see he's not even touched his drink?"

They gathered protectively about him, now that they had come to the conclusion he was in trouble.

"Look, George," the third one said. "We're your pals. Your buddies. If you're in a jam, hell! That's what friends are for. To help you out."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Well," George began, and told them about Juju. But he didn't tell them *why* he wanted the elephant.

"Three grand, the guy wanted, eh?" Fred said speculatively. "H'm. I think he'll take less. But not what you got."

They mulled the situation over in silence. But after ten minutes of deep thought not one of them had any idea as to how or where George could get the money. It was odd that none asked him why he wanted the elephant. It was enough for them that he wanted it.

"Looks like we're stymied, George," Fred said sadly. "You got a couple of hundred, you say. Well, between the three of us, there ain't another hundred. Damn it! Now if we had the dough that lunkhead boss of yours has . . ."

THE round, slightly dazed-looking eyes of George Nesbitt took on a shrewdly speculative look at the words.

"Ah!" George said, blowing through his mustache. "It's a waste of good time, what we're doing. Let's to a better occupation."

And with that, he downed his drink. The others followed. Drink followed drink until Piggy opened a new bottle of rye.

"Georgie boy," Fred said as Piggy opened the bottle, "tell us what your friend said last night."

"Whosh that?" George asked, blinking up at the other.

"Rhada—Rhada—the elephant, the pink one."

"My besh friend," George said. "Man never had better friend."

"Sh' a lie," the stocky one said belligerently. "Mansh besht friend's dog."

"Wrong, Willish," George said gently. "Mansh besht friend's hish elephant."

"Aw right. Aw right," Fred said, leering down at the two of them. The third friend stood with head bowed over the bar. He had passed out during the talk. "Beshide the point. All I want know, what did he shay lash night?"

"Who? Rhadamanthus?"

"Yeah." Fred was emphatic.

George closed his eyes in concentrated thought. He opened them quickly, however, because when he closed them the room spun in dizzy circles. A vapid smile lighted his face and a few more hairs disappeared into his mouth.

"Worsh of wishdom, thash wha' they wash," George said. "Shaid, 'Shaver'sh Shoap Shavesh Shoff, Shavesh Shoap."

"Doan make shensh," the stocky one said. His eyes were turning glassy. He would be the next to pass out. He did.

"Won'erful," Fred said. There was a catch in his voice. "Why doan I see pink elephansh? All I shee'sh shnakesh."

"Pink onesh?" George asked, curiously.

"Wha' difference it make?"

"Who?" George asked.

"Shnakes!", Fred shouted, startling two women at the bar into ordering double scotches. "Pink shnakesh!"

"Shnakesh!" George shouted. "Quick. Kill 'em. Doan let 'em get near me."

"Okay boys," Piggy's voice broke through their terror. "That'll be all. Time for bed."

ALTHOUGH George Nesbitt could have afforded better, his place of residence was a good deal below his standard of living. In fact it was a house known to be haunted. It had been a white elephant to the realty firm that owned it and when George approached them about its rental, they threw their arms around him in joy and even offered to pay his coal bill.

That was as far as it went. The up-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

keep and maintenance of it was left to George. As he found it, so George left it.

There were a half dozen rooms in the second story. George had bought a cheap metal bed and dresser and had installed himself in one of the rooms. Later, when winter came, the coal company delivered a ton of coal for the stove he had to buy. This was the house that George filled.

George and Rhadamanthus.

Rhadamanthus had come to him one night. And had stayed since then. George never forgot that night. It was the night of the day when Fleming had given him the job. George had discovered Piggy's place and had promptly shown the habitués how one went about killing a quart of rye. Then, completely lost to the world, George found a room in one of the hotels near the business section.

It was sometime during the night that he awoke. The room was icy cold. Yet the weather was warm. George knew what was coming. The dreaded shakes. He closed his eyes, trying to shut out the terrifying images which began to crowd in on him. It was no use. Weird beings, of many arms and horrible multiple faces came out of every dark corner. George began to whimper in fear. The whining noises grew louder until he was shrieking at the top of his lungs. And still they came and crawled over him, stood beside him, leered at him, told him of the terrible things they would do to him.

He twisted about convulsively, trying to escape them. But it was as if he were bound by invisible cords. He could only twist vainly. Suddenly, as if by magic, there came a stillness into his tortured dreaming. The terrifying images stopped their posturings, their threats, their very movements. A new being stalked among them. A pygmy elephant, pink and friendly looking.

"Scram. Blow. Hit the breeze," the elephant said. "Beat it before I sentence you to listen to jam sessions for the rest of your days."

They scurried back to their corners, looking back over their shoulders to see whether the elephant was serious in his threat. The elephant shooed the last of them from the room, with a flick of his preposterous tail. Then he sat in the ridiculous imitation of an easy chair, crossed a front leg over a rear one and said:

"Now then. What's troubling you, pal?"

There was something so friendly about the elephant that George found himself telling him his troubles. How he had got the job with Fleming but because of his weakness simply wouldn't be able to produce.

"Tough. Tough," the elephant said. "But you ain't a bad guy. Just said, 'Joe sent me,' once too often. What's this you gotta give this goon who gave you the job?"

George told him.

"Advertising copy! Well fill my trunk with soda pop and I'll fizz on you. So what are you advertising?"

"Well," George said, "our hottest account right now is a patent medicine outfit. They're offering a bonus for a new name for a vitamin pill they're coming out with. So . . ." his voice trailed off.

"Cinch. Call it Rite-Vite. Be right. Go right. Stay right with Rite-Vite. How's that?"

"Perfect, I'd say," George said admiringly. "In fact, not bad."

"Easy. Do it all the time," the elephant passed the compliment off with easy grace.

FROM that night on, the elephant never failed to make an appearance.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Gradually through the years, they had become excellent friends. George learned the elephant's name was Rhadamanthus. George had learned to confide in him, had even confessed to a secret desire to do a play, but had to confess that he couldn't get off whiskey long enough. Then too, if he sobered up, he'd lose Rhadamanthus. The elephant had never failed to comfort him and give him the best of advertising copy. Once George had asked Rhadamanthus to have a drink. The elephant had refused, saying:

"Never touch the stuff. Makes me see pink humans."

Now George had seen Rhadamanthus in the flesh. There was no doubt in his mind that it was the same elephant. There was a peculiar scar along the inside of the trunk. When Juju had lifted his trunk with the pointer, George had seen the scar. It wasn't possible that there could be that much coincidence. George was on his way home. He felt sure that his friend would have an answer to his problem.

"But why do you want to buy him?" Rhadamanthus asked.

It was then that George lied, the first time in all the years they had known each other.

"Because I miss you so much during the day. We don't see each other during the day and I'd like to have someone I can come home to."

Rhadamanthus was almost tempted to say, "Did you ever think of the opposite sex?" but forebore. Instead he said, "Look George. All you have to do is go to that lunkhead Fleming and say that you need the dough. And if he refuses, say that the old noggin needs a change of scenery. You'll get it."

"NOW George," Fleming said in his smoothest voice. "That's a lot of money. After all, three thousand dollars!" The thought of all that money suddenly made him angry. "Good grief, man! I should think you'd be able to get drunk on less."

"Something wrong?" George asked softly. "My stuff's not good enough?"

"Now George. I didn't say that," Fleming made haste to reply. He realized that he had made a mistake in showing anger.

"Furthermore," George went on, "you're not *giving* me this money. Whatever bonuses I get will be put back until this is paid off."

"But good grief, George. What do you need so much money for?" Fleming demanded.

"I want to buy an elephant," George said smiling.

"An—an elephant?" Fleming asked incredulously.

"That's right. Want to make something of it?"

"No. No. It'll be your elephant. Oh, very well. I don't have that much money with me. Come on down to the bank and I'll draw a cashier's check for it."

* * *

George had never seen such a fine morning. Nor had he ever felt in such good spirits. He hummed an old college tune as he walked sprightly down the avenue. He nodded and sang out a bright, "Good morning," to everyone he met, whether he knew them or not. He didn't care that some of the people turned to look at him as he passed. He was on his way to buy Juju.

He turned the corner of the street on which the carnival had located and stopped short. The lot was there, the same cluttering of hand bills and torn newspapers, but of a carnival, nothing.

He ran, wild-eyed and panting with excitement, to the barren stretch of ground and looked about for someone,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

anyone who might know something. An old man, bare of head, puttered about, picking up stray bits of paper with a pointed stick. George hurried up to him.

"The carnival!" George blurted. "Where did it go?"

The old man looked at George through rheumy eyes.

"Nah then, son. Carnival be gone. Rootin' tootin' carnival be gone."

"I can see that, Dad. Where did it go? When?"

"Arly this mornin', it be gone. Aye, rootin' tootin' carnival be gone. Come nine trucks an' take stuff on quick as lightnin', it did. Aye, took county road out Bonville way. Mought be there by now."

George turned, a visible droop in the set of his shoulders. Slowly, he walked back to the center of town. His head was bowed and his eyes were set to the ground, but he saw nothing. He knew only that he had lost Juju. He was brought up short at an intersection, by some people who were waiting for a light change. Looking up, his eyes saw the unwashed windows of the local bus company. A sign in the window caught his eye. The sign said, "Bonville, three dollars."

It was a jaunty little man who stepped up to the ticket agent and said, "Round trip, Bonville."

HE caught sight of the carnival the moment he stepped out of the Bonville bus station, down at the end of the main street.

"Where is the elephant show?" George asked the first roustabout he saw.

"Elephant show? Oh. Eddie Sims' pitch! Ain't here."

"Isn't here?" George said, horrified.

"Sorry bud," the man said. Then seeing the distress in George's eyes, he asked, "'S matter? Eddie owe you money?"

George was close to tears. He shook his head and started to turn away, but stopped when the man continued:

"Eddie's gone but his wife's still in town. I think."

Hope dawned in George's eyes.

"His wife? Where is she? How do I find her?"

"I don't know," the other said. "But I think she's at the hotel in town. Bonville Villa, I think they call it."

She was there. Mrs. Eddie Sims, room 223. She opened the door and stared at George with the most woebegone, miserable look he had ever seen.

"Mrs. Sims, do you remember me?" he asked.

"Yeah," she said. "Yeah. O-o—oh," and burst into tears.

George had avoided women all his life. There was something about them that frightened him. Now he was confronted by the most dreaded of all women, a weeping one. He acted with an instinct that hit the right note. His arms went around the weeping woman and he said:

"There, there, Mrs. Sims. It'll be all right."

He drew her into the room and made her sit on the bed. She wept bitterly for a few seconds, then realized that he was still standing in front of her. She looked up at him through tear-streaked eyes, sobbed violently twice, then recovered and said:

"I'm sorry, mister. And thanks."

And once more George acted from an instinctive reflex. He pulled out an immaculate handkerchief and passed it to her. She took it, blew a violent blast from her nose, smiled at him and said:

"Gee. I'll bet you're here about Juju."

"That's right, Mrs. Sims. I've come to buy him, if he's still for sale."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mrs. Sims sighed.

"I suppose he is. But Joe's got him now. And they're on their way to Chicago."

"Chicago! What happened?"

"My husband! That hussy! They ran off together! Eddie gave the elephant to Joe and he ran away with that baggy stripper. Eddie left me, the best wife a man ever had! O-o—oh." The tears flowed again.

But George was no longer interested in her marital woes. Joe had Juju. And the two were on their way to Chicago. He didn't wait to say good-bye, or ask for the handkerchief. He had to make the railroad station and get the first train for Chicago.

THE ticket agent shook his head. "Sorry, mister. The only train making this local stop just pulled outa here."

Breathlessly, George asked, "What about freight?"

"Pick-ups? Three a day."

"Was there a man who shipped an elephant . . . ?"

"Say! You bet. Early this mornin'. To Chicago. Feller rode down with it, too."

There was only one thing to do, George realized. Go back to Creston. Local trains made scheduled stops there. It was an hour and a half trip by bus. He hurried back to the bus station. Another wait, this one of two hours. It was early afternoon when he got to Creston.

The station was at the other end of town. He had to pass Piggy's on the way. His feet lagged as he neared the tavern, and his throat tightened in the desire to stop off and have a quick one. But he knew that if he stopped for even a quick one, it wouldn't end with that. There would be another and another and if one of his cronies was there, it would be all day. His feet lagged, but he drew on what was left of his will power. Piggy's was suddenly behind him.

For once he didn't have to wait. There was a train due in ten minutes. Chicago was four hours away.

The craving for drink became an overpowering affair, the moment George made himself comfortable. A candy butcher passed down the aisle and George bought several candy bars. That helped somewhat.

He made time pass more quickly by imagining what he'd say and do when he met Joe. Maybe Joe'd want less for Juju. Then the thought came, maybe he'd want more. No. He put that thought from him. He had the three thousand dollar check and the two hundred dollars he had saved. Fate couldn't be so unkind. Joe'd sell.

The conductor called Chicago and people began to move toward the ends of the car. George stopped the conductor on his way out and asked him where the freight station was where the elephant would be handled.

When they pulled in, George hopped a cab to the freight station.

"Sure I remember it," one of the agents said. "Think we get an elephant in here every day? But where he took the ugly beast is something I can't say. Had a truck here waiting for it."

George sat down on one of the benches in the station and gave himself over to deep thought. "This is it, fella," he said to himself. "They once said you had a mind. Well prove it. Okay. First of all, why did Joe buy the elephant? See if you can remember what sort of a person this Joe was. H'm. As you remember, he was young, exuberant, filled with the thrill that he was part of show business. That must be why he bought the elephant. It's his act now. But how does one go about

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

selling an act? Through an agent of course. But I don't imagine every agent handles that type of act. Only one specializing in circus or carnival work. So it looks like you'll have to search out every agent of that sort in this town."

George hit pay dirt on his third call. It was a run-down office in the loft of a building on south Clark Street, in the Loop. The office walls were plastered with circus posters from the long ago. The agent himself sat in the outer office.

"Yeah," he said to George's inquiry. "The kid came in today." The words came through a wreath of cigar smoke. "Something wrong?"

"No. I just want to get in touch with him," George said.

"That's easy," the agent said. "Kid's staying at the Lambert. It's a block down the street."

JOE looked at him blankly. Then a light dawned on his face. He grinned, then snickered.

"Well, if it ain't the little lush that wanted to buy Juju. What you doin' here?"

"I still want to buy Juju," George said.

The smile went away from Joe. He stared hard at George, puckered his lips, then tightened them.

"Sorry," he said brusquely. "Not for sale."

"Look!" George spoke rapidly, desperately. "You've got to sell him. I've got to have him. My whole future depends on it."

"Sorry." Joe was adamant. "No sale."

"But why?" George persisted. "I know you didn't pay Eddie what he wanted. And I'm ready to."

There was a hard, bright look in Joe's eyes.

"Look fella," he said. "I worked f'r that jerk f'r peanuts. Y'know why? Because he knew how to make a pitch. Taught me a lot. Juju and me make a good team. I can teach that little bull lots. More than he knows now. Three grand wouldn't buy hay to what I can make with him."

They were words of doom to George. Sadly, he started from the room. And then suddenly he turned and asked, "Can I see Juju before I go back?"

Joe shrugged his shoulders. "Why not? Matter of fact, I'm goin' down right now to see if he's okay. C'mon along."

Joe had quartered Juju in an old livery stable. A few small electric light bulbs gave faint illumination to the dank, redolent place. Juju was in one of the stalls formerly used by one of the horses stabled there. His little beady eyes rolled brightly when he saw Joe. But when he smelled George he squealed aloud. The sound startled Joe.

"Never heard him do that," he said to himself. Aloud, he said "Juju, brought you somebody."

It was as if the elephant understood. He began to shuffle, one foot at a time. The barn shook at the sounds.

"Juju likes you," Joe said.

George smiled. It was apparent to him, too.

"Can Juju still answer questions?"

Joe laughed. "Sure," he said. "You look sober, today. Maybe you'll get a better idea how he works. Watch."

From another stall, Joe brought out the table and slate. He set them up before the elephant and started asking the same questions George had heard him ask before.

But this time Juju didn't answer the questions. He only looked at Joe through his little eyes and at the end turned from him and walked toward

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

his stall.

Joe looked at George, bewilderment in his eyes.

"What the hell's wrong with him? Hey, Juju! Get out here."

The elephant returned. And once more Joe went into their routine. And once more the elephant did nothing.

"Lazy, eh? Well, we'll fix that," Joe said, his eyes blazing in anger. He turned and walked to a cupboard set in the wall and took a short, hooked pole from it.

George watched him stalk toward the elephant. As Joe lifted the pole to strike, George acted.

He was a head shorter and fifty pounds lighter than the other. But there wasn't a second's hesitation in his action. Before Joe could bring the pole down, George leaped on him. For the first few seconds, George had the advantage of surprise. He almost wrested the pole from Joe, so savage was his attack. Then weight and youth came to Joe's help. He twisted from George and kicked at him. The kick landed high on George's thigh bringing a groan to his lips. Worse, the pain was so intense that his hands went down to caress the leg. And Joe was on him, pole lifted on high, to deal the last blow.

But faster than Joe, was Juju. Neither had seen or heard the elephant's approach. The first thing Joe knew of its presence, a rough sinewy-muscled trunk had lifted him in the air. He shrieked once, then the elephant brought him down and had a thick, tree-like leg over him. He lay face to the ground so he didn't see Juju look to George, as if to ask, "Shall I do it?"

"No!" George commanded. "No. Leave him up, Juju."

The elephant obeyed instantly. Joe arose, ashen-faced. The pole dropped from his nerveless fingers. He backed away from the two and babbled:

"Stop him! He'll kill me. I don't want him any more. Take him outa here!"

George made him take the check for three thousand dollars before he went. Then he led Juju away.

IT WAS past three in the morning when George helped the trucker he had hired to get Juju to Creston, unload the truck. He was thankful that there was no one to watch him as he and Juju paraded in solitary splendor down the deserted streets.

The biggest problem came, however, when he tried to get Juju through the door of his house. And when that was done, George quaked in his shoes as Juju walked up the flight of stairs to the second story. The whole house shook as if it were going to come down around their ears. But at last, without incident, Juju was installed in George's room. Fortunately, it was a large room. But he had to admit, a little crowded with Juju in it. Then he wondered how Rhadamanthus would get in. Well, he thought, that would have to take care of itself. Right now, he was too tired, too sleepy to care.

For the first time since he had gone to work for Fleming, George came to work sober. All through the day, he sat at his desk and wrote. He even whistled as he worked. More, neither at lunch nor any other time, did he run out for a quick drink, as he had done in the past. When the day was ended, George went to a local hay, grain and feed man and put in an order for several bales of hay. Then he went home.

Juju was asleep when he got there.

That was strange. But he thought nothing of it and prepared his meal of bread and lunch meat. Juju slept on. George watched him, a smile of happiness on his lips. Juju was his. And

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was going to stay with him for the rest of his days. What a wonderful feeling. And for the first time, Rhadamanthus' pink self did not intrude in his thoughts.

Several hours went by and still Juju slumbered. George became a bit thirsty, a natural thing. He hadn't had a drink in two days. He knew if he didn't stop thinking about it, he'd go out and get something to drink. He looked about trying to find something to do, something to read. The room held nothing he could put to use. Then he remembered that in another one of the rooms were some books he had brought with him when he moved in.

They were covered with dust, covers torn on some, but on the whole in pretty fair shape. He brought back an armful. He put them on the floor beside the easy chair, lit his pipe, and sat down for some reading, something he hadn't done in many years.

"H'm," he said as he leafed through several. "O'Neill, Connally, Kaufman and Hart, Hecht and MacArthur. Not bad." He chose "Green Pastures," and began to read. He read for a while and his mind began to work. He saw where he could have made several passages more effective. Gradually something took place that he had thought he had lost. The desire to do a play.

He went over to his bed, pulled a pad of paper from the bedstand and lying on the bed began to write. Time passed. And the only sounds in the room were the heavy breathing of the elephant asleep in the angle of two walls, and the scratch of George's pen. George yawned widely and a tremor shook him.

"Finally," he sighed. "That was work, but I liked it."

He didn't read over what he had written. Instead, he turned back the covers, took off his clothes and lay down. Nor did he look to where Juju still slept.

Several times during the night he awoke because he thought he heard strange sounds, as of people talking, but so tired was he from the unaccustomed work he'd done, that he fell asleep again almost instantly.

HE was awakened in the morning by something smooth passing over his face. It was the elephant's trunk.

"Ah there, Juju-Rhadamanthus. How are you?"

The elephant said nothing. Instead there came a thunderous pounding at the door downstairs. It was the delivery man with the bales of hay. Juju ate like he hadn't eaten for days. Then he went off into his corner and went to sleep.

"Hey!" George called in exasperation. "You can't do that. I want to talk to you."

But Juju didn't want to talk to George. George walked up to him and nudged him. The long trunk slid out and shoved gently at George, as if Juju had said, "Sorry, fella. But I gotta sleep."

There was nothing left for George to do but go to work.

This day proved a little more exciting than the previous one. George hadn't been in the office more than an hour when Fleming stalked in. Fleming came directly to him.

"Where's that copy on the Sloan account?" he asked.

"Sloan account?" George asked blankly. He had been thinking of a plot twist in the first act of what he had written the night before and Fleming's question took him by surprise.

"Yes. The Sloan account. You said you'd have it done last night."

A look of pain creased George's features, making the mustache disappear almost completely into his mouth. He

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

remembered, now. And last night he had fallen off to sleep without—without, holy cats! The whole purpose of why he had bought Juju became clear to him. If Juju was Rhadamanthus in the flesh, or rather since Juju was the other, he had bought him so that Juju would answer all he wanted to know without him having to get drunk in order to bring Rhadamanthus out of the spook world. But Juju and he hadn't got together last night. Nor this morning.

"Sorry, Fleming," George apologized. "I'll have it for you by tomorrow afternoon."

"See that you do," Fleming said grouchily. He was still thinking of the check he'd given the little man.

But when George got home that night, again without stopping off at Piggy's, he found Juju still asleep. For a second he was tempted to go out and get drunk. Then his eyes fell on the scribbled sheets of foolscap. He remembered the twist he thought of in the office. Before he knew it he was sitting on the bed, writing in the twist.

He felt something nudge him. It was the elephant's trunk again. The beady, little eyes were regarding him with a strange intent.

"Hungry?" George asked.

The huge head nodded.

"Then I'll bring up your dinner," George said.

Again Juju feasted on hay. Only this time he didn't go to sleep. Instead, when he was done, he came over to stand beside the bed. He looked down at the marks George was making on the pad with an interest almost human, as if he understood what he was doing.

"It's going to be a play," George said. "About a man who makes friends with an animal. Only *he* can see this animal. Things happen and the animal helps our hero out, see?"

Juju nodded several times as if he understood.

"Of course there are complications, Juju. There's a girl who loves our hero and she hears him talking to his animal friend. She worries about him because she thinks he's losing his mind. Worse, the animal materializes and our poor hero has to hide it. But where, Juju, can one hide an elephant? Even a pygmy elephant? Has possibilities, hasn't it?"

The elephant seemed to like what he'd heard for he rubbed his trunk over George's face. George pushed him away, saying, "Later, Juju. I'll talk to you in a little while. I want to straighten a couple of points out first."

GEORGE forgot Juju as soon as the elephant left. A new point had occurred to trouble the little man. What was he to do with the elephant in the play? The conventional, easy thing to do was to de-materialize him. But why? George sat and brooded over the problem. And like a flash, the situation's proper end hit him. There was no reason for the play-elephant to leave the hero. So George found a reason. The play-elephant was a boy. So George materialized a girl-elephant for him. They would fall in love and when two are in love, there is always a way out.

And once again George went off to sleep without asking Juju about the Sloan account.

Once more, during the night, he was awakened by the sounds of voices. Still in a state of half-sleep, he listened to them. There were two voices, one of them Rhadamanthus'. Rhadamanthus was saying, "Get hep, kid. This guy's beat out. Let's go where the joint's jumpin'."

The other voice said:

"No. I think he needs us now, more than ever, I'm sure of it."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Yeah, maybe. But he's sober. How'm I gonna get to him?"

"Oh dear," the other voice said. "I don't know. But somehow you'll have to because I can't."

George didn't hear the rest. He had gone back to sleep.

Juju was asleep when George awoke. George scratched his head in perplexity as he watched the huge body's inhalations. He didn't know what to do. He knew one thing, though. Fleming'd be sore as a boil if he didn't have the copy on the Sloan account. He had to stall him, somehow. Applying an affectionate pat to the rough elephant hide, George left.

Fleming was sorer than a boil.

"What is this, Nesbitt?" he snarled.

George was quite calm about it. "What's the rush?" he asked. "Do they need it right now?"

"I don't know. But I do know that their campaign depends on the copy we produce."

"Let 'em wait a few days," George said. "When they see the copy I'll give 'em, they'll kiss your foot."

"Okay," Fleming said. "But if you're stalling . . ."

George knew what he meant. Yet he wasn't worried. There was only one thing on his mind, his play. It was as though he'd forgotten Piggy's, the friends who were waiting there for him, his desire for drink, everything but this fire that burned at his entrails, this overpowering compulsion to do this play.

The day seemed to last endlessly. George hurried home. While he had been working, the last act had come to him in its entirety. He wanted to get it on paper before he lost it. Juju was awake again, when he got home. The elephant greeted him by wrapping his trunk about George and lifting him high in the air, then putting him down, gently, to the floor. George realized that it was a sign of affection. But he had to get to work.

The night was half gone when he finally finished the play. And for the first time since he'd come home, George looked at Juju.

"Y'know, Juju," George said aloud, "it's a funny thing. I'll swear that you're really Rhadamanthus. I think that's why I bought you. But from the day I saw you, something strange happened to me. I stopped wanting to get drunk. It's been hard. I was a drunk too long. But now I've a stronger desire. Once they said I had it in me to write great plays. I think I've done a good one. Later a great one. But it all dates from the afternoon I saw you. Fleming will probably fire me tomorrow, because I don't give a hang whether or not I have the Sloan copy. I don't care. I'm writing again. Tell me, will it be a success?"

But Juju only swished his stump of a tail.

"No," George said. "You can't talk. I sort of knew you couldn't. I guess I used you as a symbol. And there isn't and never was a Rhadamanthus. He only came in my drunken dreams. My subconscious gave me the copy, not the elephant. But you'll never go hungry, Juju."

He yawned and realized the lateness of the hour. That night he slept without wakening. And he didn't hear the voices.

But they were there.

"Well, kid," Rhadamanthus said. "What goes?"

"I think," said the second voice, "that he'll be all right now."

THE first thing George did when he was dressed was to hurry down to the office. There was a girl in the office who, he felt sure, would type out what

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he had written. He was in such a hurry, that he didn't even look to the place where Juju usually stood.

The girl said, "Glad to, George. I'll do it right away."

Fleming didn't show up until late that afternoon. When he did, the first thing he did was walk in on George.

"Well, George," he said. "Have you got the copy?"

"No," George said. He had decided to tell him the truth, that he had no intention of doing it.

Fleming beat him to it.

"I don't think you're going to do it, either," Fleming said.

"That's right," George said.

There was an odd sadness in Fleming's manner, when he said:

"George, I gave you . . ."

"Loaned," George straightened the other out.

". . . Loaned then, three thousand dollars. I don't think it's quite fair of you."

Several things ran through George Nesbitt's mind as he stared fixedly at Fleming. Fleming was right. But in order to make the wrong right, George had to do something. Specifically, get drunk. So he could see Rhadamanthus. Or get Juju to talk. He was sure that Juju didn't talk. And he knew that he could never get that drunk again. He didn't know what to say. And then the girl came into the office with the typed manuscript.

"What's this, Mary?"

The girl hesitated, then ran out when George said:

"That's all right, Mary. I'll explain. I've written a play, Watson." It was the first time he had called Fleming by his first name since their undergraduate days. "And I think I know how to repay you. Here. Read this."

Fleming read and gradually his face brightened.

"It's sensational, George!" Fleming said.

"So you like it?"

"Like it? Why this is Broadway for sure!"

"Then how would you like to own half of it, for the money you loaned me?"

"George," Fleming said, "I'd be proud to share in it with you. What's more, I'll play angel for you. It's the best fantasy I've ever read."

The phone tinkled a summons. George smiled up at Fleming, then answered it:

"Yes, this is George Nesbitt. What! My house on fire? Oh, my God! I'll be down in a minute."

"I'll drive you," Fleming said, running after the little man.

Flames were shooting sky high when they arrived. It was plain that there wasn't the smallest chance of saving it.

"Poor Juju," George murmured.

"Sorry, Nesbitt," the fire chief said. "Some kids must have started a fire against the side of the house."

"Poor Juju," George murmured again. "Now I'll never see you or Rhadamanthus again."

But Juju didn't care. For as George had put it, love will find a way out. And Juju being a girl-elephant and Rhadamanthus being a boy-elephant, well . . .

THE VINEGAR RIVER

By JOHN LANE

THE river of vinegar is in Colombia near the active volcano Puracé. The high acid content of the river is due to its nearness to the volcano. It contains eleven parts of sulphuric acid and nine parts of hydrochloric acid in every thousand. It is so acid and sour that fish cannot live in it.

* * *

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Black Diamond Against Black Gold

By SANDY MILLER

THE oil shortage is making us acutely conscious of our dependence on that vital fluid. In the past few years there have been made more installations of oil-using devices like oil burners, automobiles, Diesel engines and so on, than in the preceding years. The result is that these things are consuming our precious natural resource at an alarming rate.

The railroads are particularly worried about this. In the past few years, since the end of the war, the railroads have been building vast numbers of locomotives and in particular, Diesel locomotives. These are preferred because of the little servicing they require, their cheapness, and their flexibility in use. At one time Diesel locomotives were limited primarily to freight yards but now more and more are being used in crack passenger and freight trains.

This is fine. They offer wonderful service. But there are a couple of things that work against them—those things are directly connected with oil. Diesel locomotives use large quantities of oil—vast quantities in fact. Oil is going up in price. Oil is becoming scarcer, and in the event of war, there are so many uses for oil that the railroads are afraid of being caught with their pants down. But they still continue to buy Diesel locomotives because they are so efficient.

It's sort of a case of consumer demand. The only thing to do is to build a better machine than a Diesel locomotive in order to combat it. A steam locomotive simply hasn't got the guts.

But engineers haven't been sleeping. They've been aware of the problem. The most flexible and efficient of all locomotives, is of course, the electric job. This is a superb machine but it has one major drawback; you cannot electrify the entire 350,000 miles of track in the country. It's impossibly expensive.

The main advantage of the coal-burner is that it uses a fuel so cheap and plentiful. There is enough coal in the United States to last us for the next two thousand years at the present rate of consumption.

If there were some way to combine these elements maybe there would be legitimate competition for the Diesels.

The engineers have come up with a solution.

Since we can't string wires all over the country, why not put the power plant right in the locomotive? In other words let's make a "loco" a traveling electric power plant. And that is just what is being done. Furthermore, just as in a stationary power plant for electricity, the loco burns coal.

THE set up is something like this: An ordinary coal burning boiler is used to provide steam. The boiler is stoker-handled, an automatical coal crusher and coal blower spraying the coal into the fire-box. This results in efficient consumption of the coal and provides a simple arrangement.

The steam is taken from the boilers and fed to a couple of turbines, which rotate at a constant high speed. The turbine shafts are connected to a couple of electric generators which produce an enormous amount of power at an efficient rate. This electrical energy produced by the turbines, is fed to the electric motors connected through a simple gearing arrangement to the driving wheels of the locomotive. The engine moves!

Because it is so easy to handle electric energy with switches, relays and other automatic controls, running such an electrified locomotive is like running a clean, neat power plant—which is just what it is.

There is no noise or vibration. Control is easy. The whole thing operates at high efficiency.

Engineers who have examined this revolutionary machine predict that as time goes on, more and more like it will be adopted into American railroading. It is a direct threat to the Diesel locomotive.

And undoubtedly this is a good thing. It means steadier more stable and cheaper transportation and it is no threat to our oil reserves. It is simply a case of the demand creating a finer product. Actually, the Diesel is just as good in all respects as the electric—except that fatal one—it consumes oil!

The new locomotive bears no resemblance to the oil. It is a streamlined affair, with the boiler up in front, the power plant in the rear. The coal bunkers even precede the boiler, and the engineer sits in a cab at the very front end. Watch for the evidence of these new and powerful giants! Railroads are sinews that tie America into one muscular entity. The electric-coal burner is a shot of adrenalin to those muscles!

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Happy to Die

by R. K. Dirk

His course was simple: he had to die. But not in just any old manner . . .

THE crowd swirled about the corner and to avoid their jostling Ken Hanson moved back into the store lobby. He looked at the windows curiously for they were covered with red paint on the inside, rendering them opaque. The door, too, had been painted and although Ken searched for a clear spot he couldn't find one.

"Wonder what's inside? I've always wondered about these places with their windows painted."

Ken Hanson usually had time to indulge his curiosity for he was one of the so-called "idle rich." Actually he was idle only in the daytime. His evenings he usually spent night-clubbing.

"Probably a bookie joint," Ken muttered, and looked about for the inevitable "outside man." But there was no one loitering about and although it was the time of day when a place of that kind should have been busiest, not a person had gone in or out in the five minutes since he stood there.

"Well, only one way to find out. I'll see if the door is open."

Ken pressed down the latch and pushed. The door swung inward and he followed it and heard it swing shut behind him. He looked around inquisitively and saw that the ceiling and two walls had been covered in the same shade of red as the windows.

At the opposite wall, his back to Ken, a small man, wearing the traditional white overalls and white painter's cap, was wielding a brush dipped in identical carmine.

Ken coughed discreetly and the little man swung around on his scaffold. From under his cap white hair curled and his good-humored face was seamed with smile-made lines.

"Hi, young feller!" he greeted Ken. "You're a little early, ain't you?"

"Well . . . I . . ."

"I know. Oh, this postwar rush will be the death of me yet. Just can't keep up with it!"

"They really keep on your tail, eh?"

"They sure do, though you're the last one should joke about it. Third place I've worked on this week," he confided to Ken.

"What's going to be in here?" Ken wanted to know.

"Oh, the usual stuff. Desk, filing cases, typewriters, records . . . you know . . ."

"I get it!" Ken looked enlightened. "A war agency!" Then, "But the war's over!"

"Not for us, it isn't." The old fellow pulled out a huge watch and stared at it. "Tarnation! I'm falling behind and it's a long way to my next job. Why don't you be a good feller and

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He gripped the girl's hand tightly in his as they fell down the shaft. And as they fell, tongues of flame reached up at them

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lend a hand instead of bothering me with foolish questions?"

"Well, I'm hardly dressed for it." Hanson looked down at his handmade brogues, his imported flannel slacks, his English tweed coat.

The painter was peeved. "You're going to have to wait anyway."

Ken was bewildered. "I don't get it . . ." he started to say.

The old man was staring past him and he turned to see what he was looking at.

Although Ken had always been an admirer of the "body beautiful" he had never seen one like this! He whistled in approval. He had to admit the face was no let-down either.

Soft black hair fell to her shoulders and framed an oval face. Eyes of deep violet were set against a delicate creamy skin.

And if ever a mouth was made to be kissed! Ken told himself.

The old man was not impressed. On the contrary, he grew more angry. "Now there are two of you to bother me with questions!"

The girl's voice was lovely and somehow sad. "I won't bother you," she said.

The painter softened. "I know, child. It isn't your fault if you're early. That's life . . . or rather . . ." He shrugged "Tell you what. You and this young feller go right through. Tell 'em I said it's all right"

Ken was still bemused. "What?" he asked.

"Through that door there." The old man pointed out a door in a side wall. Ken had not noticed it because it matched the wall so exactly.

As Hanson hesitated the old painter prodded him. "You hold on to her hand so she doesn't hurt herself," he directed.

The girl slipped her hand into Ken's trustfully. It was soft and cool and sent little electric thrills up his arm and down his spine. Together they walked to the door, opened it, and stepped through.

The floor vanished under their feet and they hurtled downward with a startling velocity.

KEN wanted to scream, but his heart had leaped into his throat. Fear tied his stomach in a tight knot. His fingers clutched the nothingness that surrounded him.

"You're hurting me!" the girl cried.

Ken had forgotten that he still held her hand. His grip relaxed. Their downward speed had become constant and they lost the falling sensation. They might have been standing in a dark room.

"This is rather an odd place to start an acquaintance but since we're already sort of going out together I'd better introduce myself," Ken suggested. "I'm Kenneth Hanson—my friends call me Ken."

"How do you do," the girl said. "My name is Sharon Moore."

"Sharon—it's too fitting. That's not your real name, is it?"

"Why, certainly it is. My friends call me Shary."

He did not say anything so she went on. "What's so strange about the name Sharon?"

"Nothing, really. It's beautiful. I just wanted to hear you say it again."

Her voice was soft, flowing around him in the darkness, bringing before him a vision of her loveliness. "You're a fast worker, Ken. You said that so glibly I'm sure you've said it many times before . . . but I can't help liking it anyway."

A murmuring sound suddenly reached their ears.

Somewhere in the depths a pinpoint

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of light glowed. The murmur grew in volume until it was a deafening roar. The pinpoint grew larger and larger and the light became a red glow that illuminated the shaft. They could see leaping flames below.

A sulphurous odor burned their nostrils and as the heat and fumes became unbearable a sudden blast of cool air hit them and swept them out of the shaft and into a chute.

After a short slide they were spilled out onto a soft, deep-pile rug. Ken assisted Sharon to her feet.

"This looks like the room we were in upstairs!" he explained. "Except for the rug, anyway."

"There's a door," Sharon said. "Shall we take a chance and open it?"

Ken held her hand in reply and walked to the door and opened it.

It was another red room. However, Ken noted that this one was furnished. Against one wall stood a battery of filing cases, and near them a desk. Close to the opposite wall was a larger desk and behind this a young man sat reading. He looked up as they approached.

"Well!" he exclaimed. "What do *you* think you're doing here?"

"The old man upstairs said to tell you it was all right for us to come down," Ken told him.

"Oh, he *did!*" the young man said. "Well! I'd like to know who he thinks *he* is, giving orders around here!"

Behind the young man a door opened and a big fellow looked in.

"What's going on here?" he roared.

"Look," Ken told the newcomer, "an old fellow upstairs told us to come down here and tell you it was all right. The next thing we knew we landed in here. What's this all about, anyway?"

The big man stared at him. "Oh," he said, "he shouldn't have done that." He pondered awhile. "Come into my office, and we'll straighten you out."

THEY followed him into a large office, and he motioned toward chairs which stood before a huge leather-covered desk. The big man seated himself behind the desk and pulled a file of papers from a drawer.

"Hmmm," he said. "What did you say your name was, young man? And yours, young lady?"

"We didn't say," Ken replied. "I'm Kenneth Hanson and this is Sharon Moore."

"Oh, yes, here's a Sharon Moore," he pointed to the paper in his hand. "But Hanson . . . there's no Hanson listed here. Are you sure that's your name?"

Ken nodded angrily. "That's about the *only* thing I'm sure of right now. How about *you* answering a few questions?"

"Such as what?"

"Such as where we are!"

The big man was amazed. "You don't know?" he asked. "Didn't the fellow who brought you to the office upstairs tell you?"

Ken stared at him. "Nobody brought me to the office upstairs. I just walked in by myself."

"By yourself!" The big man looked incredulous. "The door wasn't locked?"

Ken felt Sharon's hand on his arm.

"Ken," she whispered, "you're not . . . you're not . . ."

The big man interrupted. "I'm afraid he is not."

"Not what?" Ken shouted.

"Not dead," the man behind the desk said emphatically.

"Not dead? Of course I'm not dead! I'm no more dead than you or . . ." He turned to Sharon. "Are you . . . ?"

She nodded sadly.

Ken's voice was suddenly filled with dread. "That fall . . . those flames . . . the smell and heat . . . We're in . . .

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Precisely!" the man behind the desk told him. "In Hell!"

He shook his head. "And if we don't get you out of here, young man, there will be trouble."

"I don't understand all this!" Ken said confusedly.

"Don't worry about it. We're getting you out of here as fast as we can."

"And how about Sharon?"

"Miss Moore? After all, she killed a man. She stays."

"But I didn't!" Sharon protested. "I didn't kill him!"

The big man held up his hand. "Come, come, Miss Moore. You must realize we hear these protestations of innocence all the time."

"But I didn't!" Shary insisted.

"Tut-tut! Our man found you with the gun in your hand."

Sharon shook her head. "I tried to tell that man up there—the one who brought me to the office upstairs—that I didn't kill him. But *he* wouldn't listen, either."

The big man's eyebrows went up, doubtfully.

"If he'd just stopped to look," Sharon continued, "he would have seen that the gun in my hand hadn't been fired!"

"What?" The big man leaped from his chair and ran around to the front of the desk. "I don't believe you!"

Ken got between them. "Why don't you check on it instead of yelling at her? That doesn't prove anything!"

The big man retreated. "I will . . . I will." He pressed another button, and the young man came in.

They whispered in a corner, and then the young man hurried out again. The big man straightened his chair and plunked down into it. He tapped his fingers impatiently as they waited.

IN A few minutes the young man was back. "Oh, *Mr. Buck!* There *has* been a mistake!"

Buck shrank down into his chair. "No . . . Oh, good heavens, *no!*" He moaned. "How did it happen?"

"The district man up there, Norris, you know, says he was in such a hurry that he got the call confused with another for the place next door. The girl was supposed to be handled by a man from *Heaven.*" He hesitated.

"Well?" Buck roared.

"*Well,* sir, by the time he got back she had gone down!"

"Good Lord!" Buck got out a handkerchief and mopped his brow. "Did they find the person who did commit the murder?"

The young man shook his head. "*That* is the *worst* of it, sir. The young lady who handled the file threw it away by mistake, and it's already been *burned!*"

Buck closed his eyes. Finally he looked up. "Have the newspapers upstairs got anything on it?"

"No, sir; it's a *big* mystery!" The young fellow stamped his foot pettishly. "*Darn it,* I'll bet *that* would have been a *juicy* one, too!"

"Oh, get out of here!" Buck ordered and watched the door close behind him.

"He gets me down sometimes," he told Ken and Sharon. "Always getting time off to go to special events. Nothing but a sadist, that's what he is."

"Never mind him," Ken said. "What about us?"

"Oh, yes. We'll get Miss Moore up to Heaven as soon as we can get her clearance papers through."

The big man turned to her. "I'm terribly sorry, Miss Moore. Please accept my apology." He went on with a sigh. "It's been awful since the war began. And then they had to come along with that frightful atom bomb. Why, our Far Eastern office was so swamped that we had to lend them half our

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

staff! You can't imagine how awful it's been. The help problem is just impossible. That fellow Norris, for instance, was a fireman until we got so shorthanded in our delivery department. And Clarence was just a messenger boy in our Mediterranean division."

Ken stopped his recital of woes. "How about getting us started instead of telling us your troubles?"

Buck bristled. "There will be a man here in a moment to take Miss Moore up to Heaven."

"How about me?" Ken demanded.

"You? You're going back where you came from. Clarence sneaked a look at your file, and I can tell you that some day you're coming back here to stay." He smirked triumphantly.

"Is that so?" Ken smirked back. "If I do I'll spread the story of today's farce all over Hell. And how do you think your boss would like it if he found out that you let one get away?"

"You wouldn't do that!"

"Wouldn't I? You better think of something fast or I may decide to commit suicide and come back tomorrow while it's still fresh!" Ken glanced at the girl. "You're not going to keep me away from Sharon now that I've found her. . ."

Buck shuddered. "Wait! Let me think this over."

He thought so long that Ken became impatient. "Well," he asked, "do I go to Heaven?"

"What do you think is so wonderful about Heaven?" Buck asked him. "It's just the same as earth. People work, get married, and quarrel with their wives just as they did on earth. Only they do it forever.

"If you ask me," he confided, "Earth was created just as a toughening-up place for those going up there."

"I'll worry about that when I get there," Ken told him.

"LOOK, Hanson," Buck argued, "I might be able to change our file down here but I can't do a thing about the one in Heaven. And you've got a record of infractions that'll keep you out of there unless you can do some unusual good deed. I don't mean giving your money to charity, either."

Ken protested. "I don't know anything about good deeds. All I know is how to drink, dance, and play polo."

"Polo?" Buck got affable. "I wish you'd reconsider, Hanson. We've a splendid team here, and there'd be plenty to drink, and dances after the games."

"Don't try to bribe me!" Ken warned.

"But I don't know any more about good deeds than you do," Buck complained. "How do you think I got here?"

"Perhaps I can help," Sharon cut in.

The two men looked at her questioningly.

"First, let me explain how I happened to be found dead with a gun in my hand."

"To tell you the truth," Buck said, "I *am* rather curious."

Sharon nodded. "I have a younger brother, Donald. He works for the same people who employ my father, Thane Distilleries. Some time ago he began to gamble at Mike Furie's place."

"I've been there," Ken said.

"Then you know he didn't have a chance to win. But he met a woman there, Lora Bain, who urged him on. Donald thought he was in love with her. After he'd lost all the money he had or could borrow she got him to sign an I.O.U. Then when he couldn't pay, as they knew he wouldn't be able to, they called him into the office. They told him that if he didn't pay at once they would bring it to the attention of the company. He couldn't let them do

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that because he'd borrowed from company funds.

"The alternative they gave him was to help them steal a huge amount of whiskey from his firm. He asked for a day to think it over. Then he came to me and told me the whole story. I couldn't let him help in their dirty game, but at the same time it would just about kill my father if Donald were exposed as a thief and had to go to jail. So I decided to see Furie and try to straighten it out. I don't know why I put the gun in my purse.

"Furie invited me up to his office, and I told him I wanted my brother's I.O.U. I said I would pay them off over a period of time. He laughed at me.

"He said that he would give them to me on only one condition." She blushed. "I . . . I . . . I couldn't accept that condition.

"He had taken the I.O.U. from his wallet and held it in his hand. I was desperate. I pulled the gun from my purse and threatened to shoot him if he didn't give up the note. Just then there was a shot from a doorway at one side and Furie fell dead at my feet. As I turned there was a flash and I felt a searing pain in my chest. When the man came for me the note was gone."

Ken shrugged. "I still don't see how that's going to help our present situation."

"I thought," Sharon explained, "that if you went back and helped my brother, it would be a good deed that might do the trick. It would also save my father much pain."

"And you might find out who killed Furie," Buck put in. "You'd be saving a soul and at the same time be in good with everybody. Oh," he continued, "that would do the trick all right."

Ken nodded. "It might work at that . . ."

"It's a cinch! You can't go wrong," Buck assured him.

"Is that so? Maybe you'd like to help me?" Ken countered.

"I? You know I can't leave the office."

"Then you'd better start thinking again. If I fail," Ken reminded him, "I'll be back here. And you wouldn't want *that* to happen!"

"Oh, no! No, indeed!" Buck was worried. "I'll think of something . . ."

FINALLY he looked up. "Listen," he said. "The only man we can spare is an irresponsible young fellow. He's crude and somewhat of a mental moron, but he has his ways . . ."

Buck called Clarence. "Get Benny for me."

Clarence was back shortly. With him was a slender young man who wore a drape suit of a loud patterned material. Benny's hat was snow white, and he wore it brim up and dented in the center. A cigarette dangled from the corner of his mouth.

"Watcha wanna see me about?" he asked Buck. His gaze covered Ken and he didn't wait for a reply. "This guy looks like a torpedo," he told Buck. "And what a moll! Case those gams!"

Buck frowned distastefully. "I have a very important job for you, Benny."

Benny wasn't listening. He had found a mirror, and he was intent on straightening his tie. Then he twitched his neck nervously and pulled his too tight collar down under his protruding Adam's apple.

"Benny!" Buck pleaded, "please listen. You'll like this job. You're going to be a detective!"

"Me a copper?"

"Why not? You spend all your time with those unsavory friends of yours. You should have quite a knowledge of

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

criminals."

Benny struck what he hoped was an Edward G. Robinson pose. His words snarled around the cigarette. "I ain't a stool pigeon. You think I'd rat on me pals?"

"No, no! Nothing like that!" Buck assured him, gave him all the details.

When Buck finished Benny stared at him in wonderment. "You want *me* to go up with him and help crack the case?"

"Precisely."

"Boy! Wait 'til the fellas hear this!"

"That is just what must *not* happen! If word of this ever leaks out, Benny, I'm going to see that you get a steady job. Tending fire! Do you understand?"

Benny's face showed that he understood all too well.

"If you succeed, however," Buck told him, "I'll see that you are properly rewarded."

Benny was suspicious. "Can I have a sub-machine gun?"

"We'll consider it."

Benny grinned. "When do I start?"

"At once," Buck told him. "But don't forget, Mr. Hanson is boss. You do what he says. *Or else!*"

Ken rose. "O.K. Let's go." He turned to Sharon. "Wish me luck."

"I do . . . I do . . ." She suddenly stretched out her arms to him.

Time slipped a gear, and Ken had his foretaste of Heaven. He lifted his lips from hers and looked over her shoulder at Buck.

"You're wrong about Heaven," he told him.

Buck smiled. "At any rate, that should hold you until you get there." He shook hands with Ken. "Good luck!"

"The elevator's in Clarence's office," Benny told Ken. "Let's get goin' before she decides to kiss you again. I ain't got all year."

Clarence looked up from his magazine as they came in. "*Good-bye,* Mr. Hanson. And I hope *you* get lost," he told Benny.

THE ride up was as fast and smooth as the fall. In a surprisingly few minutes Ken found himself back in the store. It was now, however, a far busier place than when he had left. Four girls were at work filling forms and another filed them.

Benny appraised the girls. "Not bad," he announced. "I could go for you, babe," he told one.

"Fresh!" she snapped.

"You're passin' up a good thing," he threw back over his shoulder as he and Ken stepped into the lobby.

"The first thing to do," Ken started to say, and stopped.

Benny was paying no attention to him. Instead, he had turned to follow with his eyes a shapely pair of legs moving down the street.

"Pay attention!" Ken said angrily.

"Not so loud!" Benny said. "You're the only one who can see or hear me up here. People will think you're talkin' to yourself. First thing is what?"

"We've got to go to Furie's place and see what we can find out there," Ken replied. "My car is parked not far from here."

At the parking lot an attendant brought the car and held the door open while Ken climbed in. Benny got in after him and closed the door.

"Wish I had a boat like this," Benny whistled. "I'd have all the dames after me."

"I'll leave it to you in my will," Ken said.

The gambling house was an old mansion in a formerly good section of the city. Now the district was better known for its night clubs.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In front of the house a group of uniformed policemen stood talking. Ken recognized one who had been on this beat for years.

Officer Clancy grinned at him. "First time I've seen you around here in daylight, Mr. Hanson."

"I've reformed," Ken grinned back.

"Glad to hear it." The patrolman jerked his head in the direction of the house. "That's what comes of getting mixed up with folks like Mike Furie." Clancy shook his head. "They say she comes of good people. Her father is heartbroken."

"Have they found any clues to the killer?" Ken asked.

"No. And they won't either. Another unsolved murder will go into the books. And this place will be open for business tonight as usual. Mark my words."

"I should think that with Furie dead . . ."

"His prize henchman, Dough Sears, will just take over. He's already proved he was miles away when it happened."

"The old story," Ken nodded.

"Indeed it is. Politics and vice go hand in glove in this town. These hoodlums fatten the grafters, and they protect the criminals. You can bet your money that nothing will be done."

Ken agreed with him. "I'd like to get into the house, Clancy. Think you could arrange it?" He opened his hand so Clancy could see the banknote in it.

"Sure, if you think you'll get any pleasure out of looking at a dead Mike Furie. Follow me."

Clancy knocked at the door and it was opened by a man inside. The man looked at Ken.

"A friend of mine," Clancy informed him.

The main floor of the old house had been remodeled into a large dining-room and bar. A checkroom was just inside the door. Toward the back a curving staircase led up to the second floor. A sign directed patrons to the men's lounge and ladies' powder-room on the floor above.

Clancy led Ken up the stairs. On one side were the lounges and down the corridor, the gambling hall. Ken wondered where the office was. He had visited the place several times before and had never known that there was an office.

The patrolman took him through the gambling room toward a door at its rear. He opened it, and Ken found himself in a beautifully furnished modern office. Behind the desk lay a sheet-covered form.

"That's him," Clancy pointed to the figure on the floor. "They already took the girl away."

"Where were the shots fired from?" Ken asked.

Clancy pointed to some hanging drapes. He pulled the drapery aside and disclosed an open doorway behind them. "Furie lived back here," he explained. "Whoever shot him was hiding behind these drapes. They got away down the stairs behind the living quarters. There's a back door at the foot of the stairs, and we found it open when we got here."

KEN walked to the doorway and looked through into the room beyond. It was dark and he turned back. As he did so his eye caught a singed spot on the drape. It was next to the jamb where it would be easily overlooked.

The spot was on a level with his chin, and Ken quickly estimated that if the killer had taken careful aim he must have been standing erect. Therefore, the spot was even with the killer's eyes, making him about five inches shorter than Ken, or about five feet five inches tall.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I should think Furie would have caught a glimpse of the person who fired the shot," Ken suggested to Clancy.

"No," the policeman replied. "The boys from homicide say he was looking straight forward. The bullet entered his left temple and he fell onto the desk. It was good shooting because that was the only fatal spot that could be hit from where the murderer was standing."

Ken saw that Clancy was right. The desk was in a line with the doorway and the chair slightly behind it. Furie's arm, resting on the arm of the chair, would have protected his side. If he had not been so intent on the girl before him he might have seen the drapery move, as it must have.

Ken felt a surge of confidence. So far his deductions had proved accurate. "What sort of a gun was the shot fired from?"

"A thirty-two. Small gun."

"Big enough," Ken ventured.

"How come you're taking such an interest in this case?" Clancy was frowning. "Furie was no friend of yours, was he?"

"Just a morbid curiosity. I've seen enough. Let's go."

Outside once more, Ken thanked Clancy.

"Think nothing of it, Mr. Hanson," the officer told him. "That ten-spot will buy new shoes for the kids."

Ken grinned. "So you think they'll be open for business tonight?"

"And I thought you'd reformed." Clancy pretended to be shocked.

BENNY was waiting in the car, and as Ken got it rolling he leered at him. "I saw you slip the flatfoot that dough," he told Ken. "You know your way around all right. Where do we go from here?"

"To see Donald Moore. My most important job is to get him straightened out."

When they pulled up in front of the Moore home it was already growing dark. They could see lights inside, and as Ken rang the bell he could hear the murmur of many voices.

A young man opened the door. His eyes were red and his face haggard and drawn.

"You're Donald Moore?" Ken asked him.

The young fellow stared stupidly at Ken. He seemed not to have heard the question. Ken repeated it.

"Why . . . why, yes. What was it you wanted?"

"I'd like to see you alone for a few minutes," Ken told him.

Moore stepped aside and Ken went past him. The living-room was just off the hall and he could see people sitting, mumbling to each other the words that people always speak at such times.

"First," Ken asked him, "I'd like to know how your father is."

"Are you another reporter?" Moore asked belligerently.

Ken assured him he wasn't. "I'm a . . . well, a friend of your sister's."

"That's different. My father is going to be all right. At least he would be if it weren't for . . ."

"Those I.O.U.'s," Ken supplied.

Donald Moore turned white. "How . . . how . . . do you know about that?"

"Never mind how. Now listen. I'm on your side, and I'm going to help you if you'll let me. How much did you take from your firm?"

"Twenty-five hundred dollars."

"If I give you the money will you be able to replace it without being caught?"

"Yes, they don't check until the end of the quarter. I took it from a special account. But why should you offer to

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

do that?"

"Forget about that. You'll have the money the first thing in the morning. I'll pay the notes myself. There is one thing I must know, however," Ken added. "When you were called into Furie's office how many of the gang were there?"

"All of them. That is, all the leaders. Furie, Sears, Davis, and two fellows they called Sneeze and Gin. And, of course, Lora Bain."

"That's all I wanted to know," Ken said.

BACK in his apartment, Ken walked to a picture which hung on a wall and moved it aside, disclosing a wall safe. From it he drew several packets of bills. He counted out twenty-five hundred dollars and placed it in an envelope which he addressed to Donald Moore. Then on his way out of the hotel with Benny he handed the envelope to the desk clerk with directions to send it by registered mail.

* * *

As Clancy had predicted, the gambling house was going full blast. Thrill-seekers had joined the regular patrons to jam-pack the place.

"Whaddaya gonna do now?" Benny asked.

"Lose some money if I can and then see what happens. I just hope this isn't one of my lucky nights."

"Look, pal," Benny snorted. "Nobody has lucky nights in these joints. You won't have to try very hard to lose your dough."

"Good! I've got to get a rise out of the gang."

Ken frowned when he saw how crowded the place was. "How am I going to get individual attention with so many people here?"

"I can fix that easy," Benny said.

He looked around until he had located a wall outlet for electrical appliances. Then he deftly removed a hairpin from the hair of a woman standing near him. Stooping, Benny inserted the ends into the outlet.

There was a startling flash and every light went out.

A sense of fear swept through the crowd and suddenly a woman screamed. Ken flattened himself against the wall to avoid being crushed as the mob fought and trampled its way to the door.

Ken heard Benny's laughter above the roar and grinned to himself. Benny's method had certainly been effective.

In less than ten minutes the fuse was replaced. When the lights went on the place was half empty.

Walking up the stairs, Benny coached Ken.

"You better win for awhile to draw their attention. It'll be more unusual."

"But how can I if the games are crooked?" Ken muttered.

"I'll take care of that, too," Benny said.

They found a dice table around which six or seven people were still gathered. Ken made a few bets on points and lost. Finally, the dice were passed to him.

He put down a twenty dollar bill and rolled. One of the dice showed a two. The other took a queer hop and a five turned up.

"Seven! The winner!" the stick-man called, and threw the dice back to Ken.

Ken let the forty ride and rolled again. This time a six showed first. Again, the other dice seemed to hesitate, then turned up a five.

With the dice performing strange contortions Ken's twenty soon became eighty, one hundred and sixty, and then continued to mount. The stick-man got a worried look on his face.

"Say, big boy," a honied voice

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

drawled in Ken's ear, "This is certainly your lucky night!"

Ken got a whiff of seductive perfume as he turned to look at the speaker.

She was worth looking at. Almost as tall as Ken on her spike heels, she wore a low-cut evening gown designed to reveal her charms to their best advantage. Bare arms and back were flawlessly smooth and the golden tan that covered them had plainly not come from a bottle.

"Get on the bandwagon," Ken told her.

"Thanks, I'll just watch."

Ken shook his head on his next roll, and Benny let the dice take their course. Ken lost.

"That's too bad," the girl said.

Ken smiled. "How about having a drink before I try again?" he asked her.

"Love to," she said.

He took her arm and they went down to the bar. Their stools were very close to each other, and at every movement he could feel her body touch his.

Ken introduced himself.

"I'm Lora Bain," she told him.

Ken had been expecting that. He could see how she would be able to lead on men of greater worldliness than Donald Moore.

"I'm sorry you lost," she said. "I must have been bad luck."

"You couldn't be bad luck for any man," he lied cheerfully. "Besides, I don't mind losing. I can afford it."

She laughed a pleasant throaty laugh. "Where do you get all your money that you don't mind losing?"

KEN had been waiting for a question like that. "I'm connected with Dondo Drugs," he told her. "We manufacture chemicals, narcotics and things of that sort."

Her eyes flared in sudden interest. "Tell me something about yourself," Ken countered. "For instance, where did you get that beautiful tan?"

"Playing tennis. I play every afternoon when the weather is nice."

"Think you'd be willing to play with me some afternoon?" Ken said.

Her eyes did tricks. "Any time you say."

She stood up and leaned toward him, letting her hand fall on his. "I'll have to leave you for a few minutes, but don't go away. I'll be right back."

Ken nodded as she swayed off on her high heels, her body undulating temptingly.

"Oooo, what a dish!" Benny's voice crooned ecstatically in Ken's ear. "I'm goin' to put in a claim on her as soon as I get back."

"You can have her," Ken muttered. "She's gone off to tell her pals she's hooked another fish."

The man on the stool next to Ken's looked at him. "What'd you shay?" he asked.

"Nothing. Just talking to myself."

The man shook a finger at him. "Lishen," he told Ken, "you keep talkin' to yourshelf 'n' they'll put you away."

"I'll try to be more careful," Ken said.

Lora was coming back and Ken watched her sway toward him, followed by admiring glances.

"Ready to try again?" she asked.

"How can I lose with you helping me?" Ken asked her.

Benny's appreciative chuckle made Ken jump. "Don't do that," he whispered.

"Do what, Ken?" Lora asked.

He didn't try to explain. As they left the bar the drunk stared after them.

"That guy is nuts!" he proclaimed. He saw Ken's untouched glass raise off the bar and empty itself, the contents vanishing into thin air. "They're gon-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

na get me, too!" he shrieked and fled.

Benny caught up with Ken and Lora. "I fixed him!" he announced proudly.

Ken went to the same table he had played before, but noticed that there was another man handling the dice. Ken started with small bets but as he lost, made them larger. Soon he was betting hundreds of dollars on each roll. Lora had slipped her arm around him and egged him on.

"Your luck will turn soon."

"Watch me scare the daylights outa them," Benny told Ken.

Ken had rolled a five for his point. As the man behind the table picked the dice up to return them to Ken he made a deft switch. When Ken rolled them again the man pressed his foot down on the button that controlled the dice.

Magnetism fought a losing battle against Benny. The dice came up five again!

Lora's arm dropped and the stick-man, who had already reached for the money, held his rake in mid-air. His eyes popped.

"The . . . the winner . . ." he said weakly as he doubled Ken's pile.

The door at the back of the room was opened, and a man whom Ken hadn't seen before came toward them. He stood behind the table and watched the proceedings with hawk eyes.

He was short, but his unusually broad shoulders gave the impression of great strength. Close-cropped black hair grew low on his forehead to give him an ape-like appearance.

Benny was content, now that he had had his joke, to let Ken lose. Finally Ken's pockets and wallet were empty.

"Guess I'm broke," he announced.

"That's too bad," Lora consoled him. "But I'm sure they'll give you a chance to win it back." She threw a look at the thick-set man, and he nodded.

"Sure," he said genially. "We'll give him a chance. He can play on credit."

"Doug is a good fellow," Lora told Ken.

Ken's heart leaped. So this was Doug Sears. And Sears was just the right height to have killed Furie and Sharon! He was also the one who had most to gain by Furie's death. The pattern grew plainer.

Ken bet recklessly now, seeming to pay no heed to his growing debt. At last Sears called a halt.

"You owe us ten thousand dollars," he said crisply.

Ken looked shocked. "That much?"

Sears nodded. "Better come into the office and we'll get it straightened out."

Ken and Lora followed him. Benny tagged behind but caught up as they reached the door and slipped through ahead of them.

THERE were three other men in the office. Sears introduced them to Ken. He pointed to a tall, thin man. "This is Mr. Davis, one of my partners." He waved at the others. "And these two work for us. Gin and Sneeze." The one called Sneeze favored Ken with an evil grin.

Sears sat behind the desk. "Now, sir," he said, "you want to give us your check for the money you've lost?"

Ken acted as though he hadn't expected it. "Check? Why . . . I'm afraid I haven't that much money in the bank!"

Sears was thunderstruck. "You haven't? How can you think of playing when you can't pay?"

Ken took his cue. "Well, I could give you my I.O.U." He sneaked a look at Lora. She had slipped her shoes off and was rubbing her toes together unconcernedly. It was an old story to her.

Sears went into the second act. He tossed a slip of paper across the desk

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

at Ken. "Fill in the amount and sign this," he told him.

Ken did so and handed it back to Sears who let it lay before him.

"When do you think you'll be able to make this good?" he asked Ken.

"Why . . . it may take me several months to get it together," Ken replied, stammering.

The one called Sneeze leaped to his feet. "D'you think we're chumps?" he roared at Ken. "We want our dough right away. Or else!"

"Wha . . . what can I do?" Ken asked. "I haven't that much money, and I don't know where I could get it on such short notice."

Sears offered a suggestion. "How about the outfit you work for?"

"They wouldn't give it to me."

"Maybe you could borrow it."

"How do you mean?" Ken asked, frowning.

"They make narcotics, don't they? It wouldn't take a very big package of dope to be worth ten grand."

Ken looked horror-stricken. "I couldn't do that!"

Sneeze threw him a murderous look. "Couldn't you?"

Ken appeared to change his mind. "I'll . . . I'll do it. Just give me a few days," he begged.

"Now you're talking!" Sears told him. "You play along with us and everything will be fine. Slip up, and . . ."

He picked up Ken's I.O.U. from the desk. From his inside coat pocket he drew a leather folder. It was filled with papers, one of which looked like the one Ken had just signed.

As Sears started to put Ken's note into the folder Benny reached over and pulled out the one which looked like it. To the others in the room it seemed as though the paper had come out by itself. As it fell toward the desk it appeared to unfold itself and slowly turn, like a falling leaf, so that when it landed on the desk it faced Ken. He read the signature: Donald Moore!

Sears snatched at it but Ken pushed his hand away. "Just a minute!" he commanded.

The others stared at him. From a cringing victim he had suddenly changed into a confident personality.

"How'd you like to know who killed Mike Furie?" he asked them.

At his words, the one called Gin leaped to his feet. He grabbed a handful of Ken's coat and thrust his face at Ken's. "I happen to be Mike's brother-in-law! What do *you* know about his murder?"

The others had reacted almost as violently. Lora Bain jumped up, forgetting to put on her shoes, and leaped forward to catch his words. Even the hitherto silent Davis was on his feet, eyes narrowed.

The girl got in a few words before Ken could reply to Gin. "I was Mike's girl," she told Ken. "If you know anything, spill it!"

Ken took his time. "I should think people who were so fond of Mike Furie might have done him the honor of keeping the establishment closed the night of his death."

Davis cut him short. "Business is business," he told Ken. "If you really know anything about this, you'd better tell us."

"I will. On one condition," Ken answered. "That I get the I.O.U. Donald Moore signed."

The others would have hesitated but Gin, in whose hand a large revolver had suddenly appeared, took over. "It's a deal!" he said.

"Give me that note," Ken told Sears.

The man behind the desk looked at the gun in Gin's hand and complied. Ken looked it over and then put it in an ash tray on the desk and pulled out

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a book of matches. He struck one and applied it to the paper.

Sears wanted to stop him but Gin waved his gun at him. "I ain't interested in I.O.U.'s now," he told Sears.

"You will be!" Ken informed him as the last bit turned to ash. "That paper was in Mike Furie's hand when he was killed. It wasn't there when his body was found!

"Ask Sears where he got them!"

ALL eyes turned toward Sears. He was pale. He looked at the gun in Gin's hand and then up at his face. It was stony, the eyes cold and pitiless.

"No!" Sears cried. "I didn't do it!"

"Then where did you get that I.O.U.?"

"I found it. It's the truth! When I got here this afternoon I parked my car in back and came up the back stairs. I went through the apartment and came in here. Mike was dead, and the girl was dying. I saw the note and realized who she was. If the coppers found it they'd get it out of the kid that we were all tied up in the scheme to get the booze, so I put it in my pocketbook and ducked out the way I came. I intended to destroy it but forgot."

He watched the others to see if they believed him. "You know I never carry a gun!"

"That's right! He doesn't," Davis put in.

He turned to Ken. "How did you find out about that I.O.U.?" he asked.

"I'm a friend of Moore's," Ken told him.

"I mean about it being on the desk."

Ken had to avoid answering. They'd never believe him. So he launched into an account of his discovery of the powder burn on the drapery. He led them to the doorway and showed them the burn. Someone turned on a light, and they went into the room beyond.

"I figure the one who did it must have been just Sears' height," Ken explained. "He's the only one that size here, and he had the note. That makes him the logical choice."

"Am I?" Sears asked.

"Are you what?"

"The only one that size here? Take a look at Lora Bain!"

Ken looked. With her shoes off she was exactly Sears' height. In a pair of tennis shoes she would not be much taller.

Sears continued. "She was always jealous of Mike. More than once she's threatened to shoot him for fooling around with other women. How do we know she didn't come in and hear Mike saying something to that Moore girl?"

Davis thought that over. "She was a beautiful girl, all right. It would have been just like Mike to proposition her. And if Lora heard him . . ."

Benny nudged Ken. "Look at the floor behind the drapery."

Ken looked. On the light, fine-grained floor he could see a black smudge, as though someone had turned on his heel. He looked down at Sears' shoes. They had high leather heels of the kind that short men wear to make them appear taller.

"Where were *you* this afternoon?" he asked Lora.

She blanched under her tan. "Playing tennis."

Ken pointed to the smudge on the floor. "Do your tennis shoes have black soles?" he asked.

The answer was written on her face. She saw Gin advancing on her mercilessly and pulled back closely against the wall.

"I . . . I didn't mean to . . . I was crazy about Mike and when I heard . . . what he was saying . . . I couldn't take it. I got the gun from my bag and . . ."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE roar of the gun drowned her last words. For a moment she seemed to rise on her toes, and then, her eyes rolling upward, she crumpled to the floor.

Gin looked at Ken. "Thanks, pal!" he said.

"You're welcome," Ken told him. "I'm afraid I can't feel sorry for her." He turned to the others. "I suppose you won't mind if I leave now?"

"Wish you could, pal," Gin said. "But you're the only outsider who knows about this. I can't take a chance on you talking. You're going to take a ride with us!"

Ken watched while Sneeze and Gin wrapped Lora's body in a sheet. Sneeze threw it over his shoulder.

"Let's go!" Gin ordered.

The five of them, Sneeze carrying the body, filed down the back stairs and got into a large black sedan in the driveway. Benny got on the running board.

It was late, and there were few cars on the streets. In ten minutes they had passed the city limits.

"Where are we going?" Ken asked.

"To the old quarry," Gin told him.

Benny stuck his head in the window. "I got the dame's rod," he said. "I can slip it to you, and you can blast your way out before they know what hit them."

Ken thought fast. If he took the gun and shot his way out it would make him a killer, too! It might be justifiable homicide, but he couldn't take a chance on technicalities.

The car had turned down a side road and was pulling up. The great hole that was the quarry was clearly outlined by moonlight. In the forty feet of water at the bottom, abandoned machinery rusted.

"Get out," Gin said.

Ken got out and stood quietly, while a heavy chain was tied around his body, pinning his arms to his sides. Another was tied about the sheet-wrapped body of Lora Bain.

"I hate to see these killers get away with this," Ken muttered.

"They won't!" Benny promised. "I still got the doll's rod. I know you're in a hurry to get up to your girl friend but as soon as they're through with you . . ."

Gin and Sneeze had the girl's body between them, and they swung it up and back a few times to gain momentum. Then they let go. It curved out over the quarry like a huge white bird soaring and sank swiftly from sight. There were a tense few seconds, terminated by the faint echoes of the splash.

"Ready?" Gin asked Ken. He nodded, smiling.

"So long, pal!" Benny said. "Happy landings! And don't worry about these guys. They'll be along soon!"

Ken laughed. "So long," he said. He continued to laugh even after he was in the air, and his laughter came up to them until the faraway splash ended it.

Gin looked at the others.

"That's funny . . ." he said. "The way that guy took it you'd think he was going to a wedding, not a funeral!"

ROMAN CANDIDATE

★ **By J. R. MARKS** ★

OUR "candidates" in the coming election should remember that they get their name from the Latin word "candidus," which means white. All the Roman candidates wore spotless white robes or togas, and made impressive speeches and implied that their records and intentions were as spotless as their robes. From the Latin "candidus" comes our word "candid" which means "honest." Perhaps this fact should be brought to the attention of our public servants from time to time.

* * *

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The GREATEST PAINTER in the WORLD

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

By E. M. MICHALSKE

Rentbottom knew his talents were unusual; the trouble was he didn't know where he had gotten them—or even why . . .

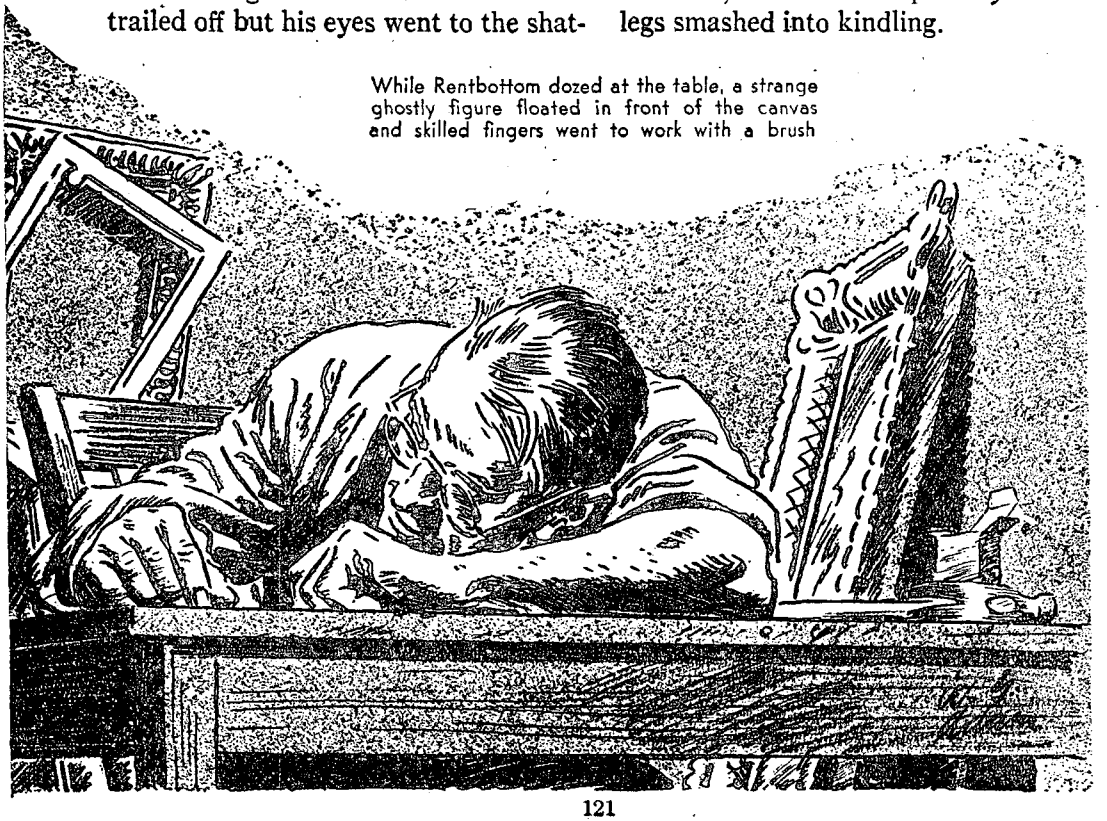
THE little man backed away, a smile of apology on his lips and a hint of fright in his eyes.

"Well, Rentbottom! What have you done now?" the heavy man in the striped trousers asked, as he stood, arms akimbo, like an oversized washwoman in morning trousers, and glowered down at the retreating figure of Rentbottom.

The smile on Rentbottom's lips died and the fright in his eyes grew painful to watch.

"I—I," the little man stuttered in a gasping tremor, "I was going to set the frame straight on that . . ." his voice trailed off but his eyes went to the shattered glass on the floor by the west wall.

Waldro Weston, of Weston's Art Gallery, didn't bother to look at the wreckage. He had been in the back room of the Gallery, shaving, when he heard the crash. Forgetting the fact that he was half-dressed, he dashed out to find his assistant picking himself off the floor. A table had been set against the wall. On it had been placed two chairs one of which still remained. But the other had given way beneath the weight of Rentbottom. Now it lay beside him, two of its exquisitely carved legs smashed into kindling.



While Rentbottom dozed at the table, a strange ghostly figure floated in front of the canvas and skilled fingers went to work with a brush

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Bitterness filled Weston's voice.

"You were going to . . . ! Man, *man!* How many times have I told you not to do things without consulting me first? Suppose . . ." Horror dawned in his eyes. Brushing the smaller figure aside, Weston went down to his knees.

A tortured sound was wrenched from his lips. His hands, shaking suddenly, held a small oil painting between them. There was an inch tear just below the right corner of the painting.

Rentbottom gave vent to an involuntary squeal of panic when he saw the tear.

"Oh dear! *Oh* dear! It's torn!"

Weston heaved himself erect and whirled on the little man.

"A two hundred and fifty dollar tear!" Weston screeched. "You clumsy fool! How am I ever going to repair that?"

Rentbottom looked sadly at the painting. It had taken him three weeks to do it. That spot of red, just there, where the tear was most to be noticed, had taken four days of painstaking labor. It had to be just right, otherwise the whole effect would have been spoiled. And all he had wanted to do was give it the proper light so that the red would have the value shown to best advantage.

Weston went on:

"But I'm not going to repair it, am I? You. You're going to do another one, aren't you?"

"But I haven't been paid for this one," Rentbottom said.

"Nor will you be," Weston said vindictively. "Do you think I can sell it the way it is?"

"Perhaps if we matted it . . ." the little man offered in a voice which held little hope.

"Matted it! I want people to *see* what they're getting. No! You'll have to do another. I'll give you two days. Mrs. Halsey is coming in Wednesday."

Rentbottom's shoulders sagged. The movement made him look like a tired little scarecrow in his threadbare suit of shiny blue serge. He started to turn away and Weston stopped him.

"And to make sure that there won't be any repeats of what just happened you get down to the hardware store and get a ladder. Here's some money."

A STREAMER above a vacant store caught Rentbottom's eye. The streamer announced that a "first class hardware store" would make its appearance soon. Rentbottom moved to the dust-covered door and peered in curiously.

He couldn't see much, but he did see that there was someone inside. Further, there was a stock of sorts.

On a sudden impulse he turned the knob, and the door opened.

A man of medium height, in coveralls, approached him. The man had a pleasant smiling face, and grey hair curled crisply above high temples.

"I'm afraid you're a bit early," the man said in a low, soft voice. "Perhaps you can come back in a day or two . . . ?"

Rentbottom flushed. The sign distinctly said that the store would not be open for a few days. He started to apologize, backing away from the other as he did so. The man raised his hand and beckoned the little man forward.

"On the other hand," he said, "perhaps we can do something for you? What do you want?"

"Why—why, I wanted to buy a ladder," Rentbottom said.

"A ladder? Is that all you want?"

There was something strange about the words. They were simple enough. Yet the little man felt there was another meaning to them. What an absurd thought! What other meaning

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

could there be?

"Y'know," the coveralled man said, smiling more broadly, "that's pretty clever. A ladder! But of course! How else? You're very fortunate, my friend. We don't have our complete stock as yet, but a ladder is something we do have."

Turning, he walked away from Rentbottom, to the far end of the store where a plywood partition separated the front from the rear. He was back in a moment, and breathing windily, he deposited a ladder at the little man's feet.

"I *knew* we had it," he chortled.

Rentbottom felt a wave of relief sweep over him.

"Well, thank you," he said.

"Not at all," the other said. "Our service, you know. We satisfy the inner man."

"The inner man?" Rentbottom asked.

"A phrase," the other said blandly. "I like to imagine that what people ask for may be for another purpose."

"But a ladder," Rentbottom said wonderingly.

"Who knows? Perhaps you have a desire to ascend to the stars?"

Rentbottom laughed and stooped to pick up the ladder. His laughter stilled when he came erect. The man was gone.

Rentbottom looked wildly about him.

"Hey! Hey!" he called again.

The partitioned walls threw back echoes. There was the hollowed sound of emptiness in their muted reflection. Dropping the ladder, Rentbottom walked to the partition and peered behind it. Nothing. Nobody.

He gulped hastily and became aware of a stifling something in the atmosphere. Quickly he came back to the ladder, picked it up and opened the door, almost putting the ladder through the glass in his haste to leave.

It wasn't until he was almost back to the gallery that he realized how light the ladder was. But the sight of Weston standing in the narrow lobby made him forget all else. The expression on the heavy man's face boded ill for Rentbottom.

"Where the devil have you been?" Weston demanded.

"To get a ladder," the little man said mildly.

"I know that," Weston continued irately. "I sent you for it. But was it necessary to go cross-continent?"

He glowered down at the smaller man. He had put on his complete uniform, consisting of the striped trousers, morning coat, grey vest and ascot. He was now ready to greet his rather exclusive clientele. And the thought occurred to him that all this was beneath his dignity, arguing with Rentbottom.

"All right," he said. "Get in there and finish hanging the rest of the paintings. Mrs. Halsey called while you were gone and said she'd be in today."

RENTBOTTOM brought the ladder in, placed it along the wall where the accident had occurred and clambered aloft to adjust several water colors which he knew Weston was going to show the Halsey woman. Anger had been smouldering in his breast at the injustice he had received. With his first step the anger grew and with each succeeding step it became more and more a burning issue with him. Why did he have to do this? Wasn't he as good as the rest?

He stood on the topmost step, his usually placid features twisted in a grimace. There were two water colors to be adjusted, insipid looking things of no particular distinction or taste but which Weston was pushing because he was receiving a commission far above the ordinary on them.

"I can do better, *have* done better,"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Rentbottom mused to himself. "Bah! That little oil. I haven't been paid for it. Wait till I sell it, the fat boor says. Wait! Does he think my landlady waits for her rent? Or does he think food can be bought with promises? Two hundred and fifty dollars! He'd have gotten a thousand. As though I don't know what's on his mind? I'll mend it or mat it. The red won't show up so well. But he'll sell it, if not for a thousand then for half. And what'll I get? My usual hundred."

"Hi there, Curly-top," a voice called from below.

Rentbottom looked down and the scowl on his face grew deeper. A handsome but vapid face grinned up at him. A face which displayed immaculate white teeth. Below the face and set to either side of it were a pair of shoulders so wide Rentbottom couldn't see the rest of the body. Rentbottom wanted to say, "Shut up or I'll let the air out of those shoulders." He knew better however. On the one occasion where he had rebelled against the jibes of the man below, he had been lifted up, held aloft and threatened with instant extinction.

"Hello," Rentbottom said in a weak voice.

The face grinned wider.

"What're you doing, gonna put clouds on the ceiling?"

Rentbottom sighed wearily, adjusted the paintings properly, and came down the ladder. With each descending step his spirits sank. While he was at the top he had the feeling before his tormenter appeared on the scene that he could do things, get away from Weston and his animal circus. Now that he stood on the floor he was back in the gloom of his dispirited world.

Rentbottom drew a slender hand through his mouse colored, thin hair.

"Guess I'll go back to the shop," he said vaguely. "Got some things to do."

"Like fixing the chair," the young giant said maliciously.

Rentbottom winced at the words. He had forgotten the chair. But Weston hadn't. He had evidently given instructions to somebody to remind Rentbottom about it. That meant a whole day spent in repair. As though in confirmation, Weston appeared on the scene.

"Come on, let's get moving," he said. "Fix that oil so that the tear won't be noticeable. And better do a good job on the chair, too."

The little man hung his head, turned, and walked to the rear where Weston maintained an extensive repair service. Here he would be alone. And here he could have his dreams and build whatever castles he wanted.

THE day was at an end before he was through. Just as he finished the last bit of doweling on the chair, Weston came in. There was a smile of satisfaction on the big man's face. He was rubbing his hands delightedly.

"She bought it," he said exultantly. Then grudgingly, "You did an excellent job on the oil. Sold it for the two fifty."

Rentbottom waited for the other to go on about the money he had received, but Weston had something else on his mind. Motioning with a well-manicured hand toward a bench, he sat on the chair. The little man did as Weston had indicated and waited.

Weston stroked his face with reflective fingers.

"Something occurred to me," Weston began, "which could net us a bit of money. I don't mean the small amounts we've been making."

Rentbottom wondered who he meant by, "we." Certainly not he.

"Y'know," Weston went on, "a number of clients have commented on the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

excellent craftsmanship displayed in your work. Of course I couldn't very well tell them that they were all done by one man. But the point is that more than once some of your oils have caused them to ask whether they were the work of the old masters. Now . . ." he paused and sent the little man a shrewdly prying look. But the eyes looking into his were as weak and frightened as ever. It was plain to see that Rentbottom hadn't the slightest idea of what Weston was talking about. "Now," Weston went on, suddenly conspiritorial, "I have a little idea. I remember that once you said with the proper materials you could copy any of the old masters. Right?"

Rentbottom shook his head in affirmation.

"I have the materials," Weston said. "Now you go home. Take a copy, say of Picasso; any of his clowns I have. That ought to do. And make a copy; an exact copy, but do it as you said you could, so that no one will be able to say it isn't the real thing. And I . . ."

Rentbottom suddenly realized what the other was saying. He was aghast at the thought. That was worse than stealing! He had done it once. But only because he was starving.

". . . We'll sell it," Weston concluded.

"No!" Rentbottom forced the word from his lips.

A nasty smile curled around the mouth of Weston.

"Yes," he said softly. And the little man found significance in the way it was said, with an undertone of threat. He knew what was meant. With all his heart he tried to say, "I don't care. Tell the police. But this I won't do anymore." But instead he only hung his head lower until it rested against his chest.

As though in reminder, Weston said: "The Institute of Art is still looking for the man who faked a Rembrandt and sold it to them."

"But you sold it," the little man said.

"And you were the accessory! You also will go to jail. You know what jail will mean to you. Ten years, I think. You will die long before that."

Weston grinned as he said the last words. It was his hold on the little man. He had met Rentbottom, an impecunious artist, living in a small loft on Rush Street. Weston was enough of the opportunist to know that in the little artist he had a gold mine. He could fake anything well enough to make a man think it was the real thing. And he had reached the stage where starvation was not far off. He was ready for anything. Weston had furnished the canvas and oils, Rentbottom had done the rest, the aging, the copying, all the tricks which made Rembrandt's work his own. And Weston had sold it. But the little artist never knew how much for. All he got out of it was a hundred dollars.

And now Weston wanted his peculiar genius put to use again. Weston arose, went into the shop, and returned with one of the clown pictures he had mentioned. Throwing it to the other, he said, "Okay. See if you can do it by morning."

RENTBOTTOM looked at the finished water color, suddenly bent his head to the table and burst into a flood of tears. At last the fit of tears over, he removed his clothes; he had been at work for ten hours, and crawled into bed. Oddly enough he fell asleep almost instantly.

Bright sunlight filtered through the lace curtains. The man on the bed stirred, turned his face from the rays and suddenly sat bolt-upright.

"Wha-wha," he stuttered to himself. Then seeing the clock on the chair be-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

side the bed, he threw the thin sheet which served as blanket and sheet aside and leaped from the bed, chattering to himself, as he pulled with frantic fingers at his trousers, "Oh dear! Noon. Four hours late! Weston will throw a fit. Maybe he thinks I ran away . . ."

The thought made him redouble his efforts. In five minutes the painting under his arm, he raced down the flight of stairs. The painting was covered. It had been the last thing he had done before going to sleep.

A cruising cab caught his eye. Although he had a single dollar in his pocket, he took it. It would save twenty minutes.

It was a fortunate thing the Gallery was empty. Weston glowered at him but said nothing, his eyes seeking out the package under the little man's arm.

Rentbottom walked quickly to the rear. Weston said something to the tall, well-dressed clerk, and followed.

Rentbottom hurried to unwrap the painting, all the while his eyes, like a puppy's who had done wrong, pleaded forgiveness for his tardiness. Still he couldn't understand Weston's repressed savagery.

Oddly enough Weston didn't look at the painting when it was uncovered.

"Listen!" he said. "Were you here last night?"

Rentbottom gave him a wondering glance. "No," he said.

"I guess it couldn't have been you," Weston said in tones which implied a hope that it should have been him. "Vandals! Came in last night some time and defaced the ceiling."

Rentbottom didn't hear the last part of it. He was staring wide-eyed at the painting. His jaw trembled and his eyes were wide in fright and disbelief. Weston saw the look and stepped closer. He lifted the painting and held it up to the light.

"But I didn't do that," Rentbottom bleated. "I copied something else . . . that is I improved on something."

Almost as if Weston was glad it had turned out the way it did, he said:

"So that's what you did last night. And I suppose you thought it was pretty funny. Well, now you can whistle for your money. What's more, from now on you're going to work for whatever I'm going to pay. And you might as well know that you'll be lucky to keep yourself together on what I'll give you."

A frown of concentration gathered in the corners of the little man's eyes. He kept staring at the painting. It seemed to be all lines and angles. Yet it made a pattern that somehow pleased. In fact the more he looked the more he realized that it was a work of art.

"I wonder how that happened?" he said more to himself than to be heard. "What am I saying? I didn't do that. Someone, though I can't see how that was possible, came into my room and substituted this for what I did!"

BUT though the little man hadn't intended his words to be heard Weston heard them. The big man's hands went out to grip the shoulders of the smaller one.

"And now you're giving me some cock and bull yarn, eh?" Weston raised his voice in a shout. "I'll show you. So you're an artist? Well, I'm going to sell this fool thing. For a dollar. And of that dollar ten cents will be yours. What's more that's all you're going to do for me from now on. And I'm going to sell each of them for a dollar. How do you like that?"

It was the last straw. Rentbottom pulled himself free from the other, stepped back and said:

"I don't care what you do. I say I didn't do that! And if I did, I'd be the proudest artist alive. Whoever did it

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

is a genius."

It was the word that did the trick.

"Genius?" Weston asked in a gentle voice.

"Yes. The line work and design stamps it as such," the little man said.

"Well, what do you know?" Weston said. A look of avarice came to his eyes. If there was one thing Rentbottom knew it was art. Weston had never gone wrong on any opinion of the other's. Weston sized the situation up immediately. Either Rentbottom or someone else had done this. The little man denied it. Therefore he had a friend, perhaps as broke as he. Weston thought, if I play this right, maybe I can get the other guy to do these things on the same basis as jerky here. And knowing the sort of people my little friend associates with I'd make book on that. But I'll have to be diplomatic. This guy's pretty much down to the thin edge.

"Perhaps I have been a bit hasty," Weston said in gentler tones. "That ceiling," he continued by way of explanation. "When I came down this morning and saw it . . . Well! You can't blame me, can you?"

Rentbottom looked at the other with amazement.

"Of course," he said quickly. "But perhaps it can be rectified?"

Weston, still carrying the painting, led the other out into the main gallery. Pointing upward with a dramatic finger, he said:

"Look!"

Expecting words of horror, Weston was surprised to hear the other draw in his breath and say:

"Why that's the most wonderful thing I ever saw!"

"What do you mean?" he asked. As far as Weston was concerned the ceiling looked as if some juvenile had managed to erect a scaffold and had gone to work on the ceiling with chalk.

"I've never seen anything like that outside of the famous Abbey in Ligorno, Italy," Rentbottom said. "In fact it looks enough like Vermiformi's work to be his own."

The name sent an echoing chord through Weston's brain. Vermiformi. He snapped his fingers.

"You mean the fifteenth century man who only painted for the Abbey?" Weston asked.

"That's right. But how the devil, or rather *who* the devil is good enough to imitate him?" Rentbottom asked.

THEY were the strongest words the little man ever uttered. But the masterpiece up there on the ceiling stirred him as the originals had. Forgetting Weston, he went back to the rear room and got the ladder. Once again he became conscious of its lightness. And once again as promptly forgot once it was spread. His depression was forgotten, the fright Weston had given him a few moments before, everything, except the wonder of the painting. Something made him place the ladder at the right hand corner of the room.

When he mounted almost to the ceiling he saw the small smudge of a signature.

Weston watched him descend and wondered at the lost look in the little man's eyes. Rentbottom had to hold to the ladder for support.

"What's wrong?" Weston asked.

"It can't be," the little man mumbled. "He's been dead for five hundred years."

"What are you talking about?"

"The signature. It's Vermiformi's. Or the best forgery I've ever seen."

Before anything else was said there was an interruption. A woman's voice made them both turn. Standing, watch-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ing them with an expression of disdain was a stout, short woman. She was peering up at Rentbottom through short-sighted, shrewd, little eyes. She had a small hooked nose, much like a parrot's. The little man on the ladder recognized her as the redoubtable Mrs. Halsey. Although she was beside Weston, her remarks seemed to be addressed to Rentbottom.

"I should imagine you'd have better things to do with your time than to stand about watching some idiot paint your ceiling."

Rentbottom flushed to the very roots of his hair at the shrill words. But Weston, used to the odd ways of the woman and ever ready to kowtow, had a ready answer.

"Mrs. Halsey! How good of you to come! I was just saying to Kenton that I'd hoped you would drop in as you said you might."

"And why," she asked, giving him her attention, "did you hope I'd come in?"

"Because of that!" Weston exclaimed, pointing with a dramatic hand to the ceiling.

"That?" There was astonishment in her voice. "Why, it looks like something a malicious child did."

"A true primitive," Weston explained. "The only one in this country. Vermiformi. One of the world's greatest artists. Never before has any gallery had even a single one of his paintings. I count myself truly fortunate having come into the possession of this."

But in his excitement, Weston forgot that the painting was *on* the ceiling. She brought it to his attention. A sickly smile wove its way around Weston's lips. Rentbottom marveled at the quick wit of the man. For almost without hesitation, Weston replied:

"Yes, I know. I had it transferred to it for the effect it gave. It looks precisely as it did in the Abbey for which Vermiformi did all his work."

"Really? How interesting! Do tell me more."

WESTON took her elbow and steered her away from the spot. They disappeared from view into Weston's office. And Rentbottom descended the ladder. The marcelled young giant came up just then and motioned with his head toward the two who had walked off.

"Looks like Westy is gonna get her hooked on something big, from the way he was talking in Pudgy's ear."

Rentbottom, still puzzled over the business of the painting on the ceiling, was paying small heed to the other. But at the next remark, he became all attention.

"Westy's sure a smart operator. The old gal's gonna make an awful lot of dough for him if she does like she says she's gonna."

"How is that?" Rentbottom asked.

"Hold the annual art show in the galleries," the other said.

"An art exhibit here?"

"Sure. And you can guess what old Westy's feeling about that."

Rentbottom shook his head, half in sorrow and half in agreement. It meant that he would have to fake . . . and suddenly he was reminded of the painting someone had substituted for the one he'd done. Kenton, the clerk, looked at the other in amazement, as Rentbottom turned and walked off. Usually it was the other way around.

He stood and looked down at the painting for a long minute. His brow was wrinkled in thought as his mind went over the whole of the night before; but nowhere in it was to be found the key to the mystery of the painting. Yet that it was his seemed to be such an

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

impossibility. A sudden thought struck him. The paper in which the painting had been wrapped still lay upon the table. He examined it minutely. He had a habit of making an odd knot. He gasped when he saw that the knot was the one he always made.

Shaking his head, as though it had been filled with cobwebs which had to be shaken off, he began the task of making a frame for the painting. For with his other duties was the one of framing all canvases. He was occupied at that task for the greater part of the morning. When he was done it was time for lunch.

Usually he went to the drug store on the corner for a sandwich. But this time he walked past it and on until he came again to the store in which he'd purchased the ladder. Something impelled him to walk there. He *had* to see that man, see the interior again. But when he looked into the window he saw that the place was empty. And after stepping back he noticed that the sign was gone. Nor did the door open when he tried it.

"NOW get this, Rentbottom," Weston said. There was an air of repressed excitement in his voice as he talked. He had collared the little painter the instant he had returned from his lunch. "The old lady is sponsoring the exhibit, get it. There's a hell of a lot of work to be done. Most of it you'll have to do. But this time I'm going to pay. Plenty, if it's done right."

Rentbottom's mind was in a whirl. The events of the last day and night were more than enough to make him wonder if he weren't losing his mind. Now this. What did Weston want of him now?

Weston didn't take long to enlighten him.

"Old Pudgy's the leading art lover in the community. When she buys a painting, or even recommends one, the rest follow like sheep. Now here's the pitch. There's another person in this town. A Mrs. Fetheringjerk. She's never acknowledged Pudgy's right to set the tone for these things. I'm going to set one against the other. That's where you come in.

"Oh, it'll work out beautifully! Instead of one exhibit, I'll hold two. One for each and their followers. When one from each set buys something, there will be one from the opposite camp who will buy something just to show that they have the better taste. In fact, I've already sold that wall thing . . . and, by the way, on thinking over what you said, I mean about who painted it, you sly rascal, I *know you did*."

Rentbottom looked at the other in surprise.

Weston explained:

"I suppose you think no one saw you, eh? But I guess you didn't reckon on the watchman. Ah, yes. He saw you. It was a lucky thing he recognized you and thought I told you to do it. At any rate, while you were out to lunch I had an expert from the Institute in to look at it. He gave me his word that it was a genuine Vermiformi. Man, what an artist you'd have made. In the fifteenth century."

It was a lucky thing for the little man that there was a chair behind him. Otherwise he'd have fallen to the floor in collapse at the words. The watchman had seen him. What sort of gibberish was this? How could the watchman have seen him when he was home in bed, asleep? Or was he? He looked up, his rabbit face filled with horror. Could it have been possible that he walked in his sleep? It was true that he had a key to the shop. Sometimes it was necessary for him to work very

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

late. Weston had given him a key for just such an emergency.

Torn between doubt and suspicion, he stared dumbfoundedly at Weston. But the other was lost in the pleasant vistas created by the thought of the money he was going to make.

"Look, little chum," Weston was amiability itself, now. "You better get going on these little things. There isn't much time you know. And by the way, do some of the moderns. Like that design you did last night."

Rentbottom hesitated and Weston hurried on:

"Oh, come now. Don't tell me you don't have time. Which reminds me. I'll forgive you your slowness in doing previous work for me. After all, I'll admit I wasn't paying too well. But now! Why, this is the making of your fortune."

"Ah, yes," Rentbottom said in a low voice. But his thoughts were still on both the design he had supposedly created and the marvelous reproduction on the ceiling.

Weston patted his cheek fondly and walked away.

But the little man was not to be alone with his thoughts. In a few seconds, Kenton, the wavy-haired boy came over. There was an odd respect in his eyes.

"Say! What's this with you and Westy?"

Rentbottom looked blankly at the other, stood up and walked aimlessly about the shop. The other stared at the little man as if he thought Rentbottom had lost his mind. For Rentbottom moved from counter to counter, wall to wall, and stared fixedly at whatever objects came to view.

At last, having made a complete circuit of the room, he came back to Kenton. Standing squarely before him he said:

"Tell fat stuff that his artist has taken the rest of the day off."

For Rentbottom had suddenly realized that in Weston's manner and voice was more than just a concession. In order for the deal Weston had in mind to succeed, Rentbottom had to draw. The whole thing, in fact, depended on the little artist. And for the first time in a long time, Rentbottom had the upper hand of a situation.

Kenton's mouth hung almost to his chest at the words.

RENTBOTTOM deposited the portfolio of prints he had taken with him from the galleries, on the table he used as his work bench. Opening the flap he lifted them out and looked them over carefully. It was a fairly representative group. Almost every famous modern and period was there. Then tipping the manila envelope upside down, he shook loose the various pigments and materials he had taken also. Leaving the stuff scattered about the table, he stepped to the closet and took from the shelf a large number of canvases. And from behind his bed he took a stack of scratchboards. He was ready to begin his great job of fakery.

He worked all through the afternoon and far into the night. When he was done he had a copy of almost every painting he had taken with him. Looking at them through red-rimmed, tired eyes, he had to smile in delight at the job he had done. To his artist's eyes he had done more than a copying job. It was the real thing! That is, it would be as soon as he could to do the faking on the aging that was necessary. But somehow when he started to work again, he found that he couldn't keep his eyes open. As much as he willed them to stay open, his muscles refused to co-operate.

Of a sudden, his head fell forward

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to the table top.

Rentbottom woke, his head dizzy, as if he'd been on an all night drunk. Looking woozily at the scattering of papers and canvases on the table he suddenly became wide-awake. Every last one of them was blank! Wildly, he shuffled through the various things. Not a single one of them bore the smallest sign of paint or water color.

There was the sound of a voice from the outside. It was the strident call of his landlady.

"Mister Rentbottom. Mister Rentbottom."

He stood, almost falling in his weariness, and stepped to the door, and opening it, stuck his head out.

"Yes?"

"Telephone call."

Still in a daze, he walked down the three flights of stairs that led to the phone in the first floor hall. He picked up the phone and the booming voice of Weston came to his ears.

"Rentbottom?"

"Yes?"

"Get down here as fast as you can."

"Why? What happened?"

"Never mind. You just get here."

This time Rentbottom didn't take a cab. He was too heartsick, too tired in body and spirit to care. He walked to the galleries.

WESTON was alone in the place. Rentbottom's eyes widened in amazement when he saw the confusion the usually well-kept stock was in.

It was as if some mischievous youngsters had been permitted their freedom in the galleries. Every picture on the walls hung askew, every bit of bric-a-brac was overturned; the place looked less like an art gallery than like a rummage counter.

"Look!" Weston said in anguished tones.

"I see," Rentbottom said. "What happened?"

"How the devil do I know?" the other asked. "I came down this morning and was confronted with this. What do you know about it?"

"Me?" the little artist's voice held shock. "What could I know about it? I was busy . . ." his voice faded to a whisper. Busy in what, he thought, sleep?

"Well," Weston said. "The watchman will be down soon. I called the agency and they're sending him down. And if *he* doesn't know anything . . .?"

Rentbottom knew what the other meant. Someone was going to pay for what had happened. And it wasn't going to be Weston. The fat man was reminded of something.

"Did you finish those drawings?" he asked.

"Not just yet . . ." Rentbottom said slowly.

Slowly Weston's eyes went wide and his voice became hoarse with anger.

"Damn you!" he shouted. "Everything depends on you and you come back here and tell me that you haven't got anything done. I'll break every bone in that scrawny body of yours!"

"But I haven't said that nothing is done," Rentbottom bleated. "Believe me, I have. It's just that there is so much . . ."

"Well when?" Weston said in softer tones.

"Another day, perhaps two."

"So why did you come back?"

"But you called me . . ."

Weston was reminded of what had happened as the door opened and a blue-uniformed man walked in. Weston loped to meet him, Rentbottom not far behind.

But it was apparent from the way the watchman looked about him that it was a mystery to him also. He drooled

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

words:

"Wha-what . . . How the hell . . . Why nothing was wrong when I left."

Weston was speechless But not for long.

"What do you mean, nothing was wrong when you left? What time did you leave?"

"The usual six o'clock."

"You mean all this was done from six to nine, when I opened?" Weston asked.

"Guess so."

And there was no budging the watchman from his statement. He had been there till six. And when he left, the place was in order. Finally, Weston told him to go. While they were talking over the madness that had happened, Rentbottom strolled about curiously His artist's eyes, observant to details, noticed a peculiar order in the seeming disorder. It was as if there was a kind of arrangement in the way things had been placed.

Everything commonplace had been shoved aside and the unusual and artistic had been brought to the fore. He looked at the walls and found the same thing to be seen there. He wondered what sort of person or persons had done this.

In the meantime Weston was deep in thought. Calling irately, Weston said, "You say it will take another day or two to do the work?"

"Yes."

"Then bring your materials here and do the work in the back room. That way you can keep an eye on the gallery. I don't think there will be any more shenanigans from now on."

"What about sleep?" Rentbottom asked.

"During the day. I'll hire someone to do the repair and maintenance."

Rentbottom bit his fingers in agitation. Weston knew what was on the other's mind.

"Oh, don't worry about money. I'll give you some for a room to sleep in. But I want that stuff finished before Thursday. The exhibit goes on then."

FOR two days Rentbottom worked relentlessly, driving himself to the point of a nervous breakdown, trying to complete even a single drawing. It had come to that. It was, in fact, as if he'd forgotten whatever he knew. He could no longer even copy. The things he did became meaningless daubs of paint or formless lines. But Weston never knew how little was being accomplished. Nor did he seem to care. For the vandals had never appeared again with Rentbottom's stay.

Then it was Wednesday night. The watchman appeared on the scene, gave the little man his greeting and wandered off to a spot where he could catch forty winks without being disturbed. Rentbottom didn't even hear the other.

He had always been thin, shabby, almost wasted, so little did he eat or sleep. But now he had become emaciated. Worry and fatigue had carved new lines and wrinkles into a face which before had resembled a mummy's, and now looked like the mummy's antecedent, only hungrier.

The night wore on and so did Rentbottom's despair. He beat his hands on the table top as if he thought to spur some semblance of life into them that way. The hours sped by on ticking wings. At the end nature won out. The little man bent his head to the table and gave way to the futility of tears. Sleep washed them away.

Joe Sleepwell groaned, grunted and grimaced to wakefulness. Something had disturbed his slumber. Stretching, scratching and sniffling, he arose from the chair behind the counter of vases, and looked about him. The clock on

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the far wall said it was four. He had slept well. Then he remembered the odd sound which had awakened him, and wondered what it was. Mice, was his first thought, but not his next. For he *saw* that no mouse could have created the havoc which was the Weston Galleries. Every bit of gim-crack had been thrown to the floor. Piled in a huge heap near one wall were almost all the paintings in the gallery. And perched on a ladder was the little artist, his hands busily engaged in doing something to the ceiling.

Bellowing his rage the watchman made for the scene.

"Damn it to hell!" he shouted. "what're you up to?"

But the little man on the topmost rung either didn't hear or didn't care, for he continued to daub bright paint on the ceiling. The watchman became angry and forgetting possible consequences, shook the ladder. For a second it was a moot question whether the man on top would tumble or the ladder collapse, but as it happened, neither occurred. The watchman looking up, saw the anguished look on the other's face and bellowed for him to descend.

"So you're the laddy-buck what's been giving us the trouble, eh?" he said laying his hand on the smaller man. "Well, now. I think there'll be an end to that."

There was, but not the way he thought. For quite suddenly and without warning, Rentbottom hauled off and sent his bony fist smashing home to the point of the larger man's jaw. It was a one-punch knockout.

WALDRO WESTON paused outside the establishment which bore his name and, turning, surveyed the street. The sun was bright and somehow the usual drab street held an air of cheerfulness. Weston smiled and turning, inserted his key.

He gave voice to a single shout of utter despair when he saw the interior. His eyes lighted on the watchman, seemingly asleep with his face against the wall. And in an instant of deep savagery Weston walked to him and kicked him as hard as he could in the seat of the pants.

"Get up, you fool!" he shouted.

For a moment the watchman's face mirrored bewilderment. Then full consciousness returned and with it the memory of the night before.

"That little guy. He did it! He was the one who's been messing this place up. I caught him at it. He knocked me out."

Weston listening in growing bewilderment at the flow of words. It didn't make sense. Rentbottom responsible for this? But why?

Weston strode to the rear. The little artist sat in a chair pushed close to the table. His head was buried in his folded arms. And indelicate snores issued from his half-parted lips.

Weston's ham-like hands gripped the thin shoulders and pulled the other erect. Still holding fast to Rentbottom's shoulders, Weston shook the man as he would a puppy.

"So you were the scoundrel! I could kill you with my bare hands!"

At last he released Rentbottom, who dropped to the floor in complete exhaustion. And from the floor asked:

"What happened? What was the idea of that?"

"You dare to ask?" Weston bellowed. "As though you didn't have anything to do with what is in there?"

Rentbottom scrambled erect and stepping past the other, peered into the gallery. His eyes went wide and his mouth fell open.

"Who-who," he stammered, "did that?"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You. You did that, "Weston said in tones which implied he was going to gain his pound of flesh and more.

"But I couldn't," Rentbottom said. "I was asleep!"

"Tell that to the watchman. Asleep! You slugged him after you did your dirty work, you did. Yes, you did!" Weston shouted as the other started to shake his head in denial. *"And all this* just when I had such nice plans!"

There was the sound of a door opening. It heralded the coming to work of the other three men. And Rentbottom got an idea.

"There's only one way to save this," he said. "I don't know what happened, no matter what you think. But if the painting or whatever happened is as good as I think, like the line thing I was supposed to have drawn, then I got an idea how to make money for you. Now get me the smallest size costume you have in the place. You know, one of those businesses an artist is supposed to wear. Quick, man, before the first of your customers arrive."

In a few minutes Rentbottom was dressed in the costume Weston brought him. And in another few minutes, under the wondering eyes of the three clerks, he shaved his three-day growth of beard. Then, shoving his thin hair about until it resembled a scraggly representation of a mop, he struck an attitude.

"Do you think this will make them think I'm a kind of odd genius?"

"I get it," Weston chortled. "You are going to admit, or rather I'm going to say that you saw the junk here, and knowing that you were being exhibited, smashed everything to the floor. In anger, of course. But you are a genius. And we certainly must forgive you, right?"

"That's it. Now hurry. And act as if that was what happened."

MRS. HALSEY and her attendants, like tugs escorting an old, but tried and true battlewagon, were first on the scene. She looked at the artistic carnage with a jaundiced eye.

"Is this," she demanded, "your idea of what is the proper setting for an exhibit?"

Weston was affability itself. And showmanship.

"My dear Mrs. Halsey," he purred like a kitten confronted with catnip. "Surely you didn't think I would do such a thing. But . . ." he paused, and continued in a lower, conspiratorial voice, "but genius must be served."

"Genius?" Mrs. Halsey's eyes, bosom, and hauteur rose at one and the same time.

"I forgot to mention," Weston said, "but I was able to get the foremost artist of our times to exhibit. None other, in fact, than Gremlu Shrldlu, the Hungarian tempera, water-color and black and white man."

Murmurs of astonishment rent the air at the pronouncement of the name. Rentbottom appeared on the scene, like the genie from the bottle when it was rubbed.

Weston bowed in the little man's direction and said in a low, worshipful voice:

"Gremlu Shrldlu."

"Aaaah!" the little man snarled. Then in a voice low and masked, "Bah! Peegs. I spit on you."

Mrs. Halsey huffed and puffed at the words. But she couldn't blow Weston's house down. Because the only answer she got was another, "Peegs!" from Rentbottom.

"But this way please," Weston said, leading the way. "Let me show you the works I have collected."

And then the other art lover, the formidable Mrs. Fetheringjerk appeared, also attended by her court of

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tugs.

"Mr. Weston," her voice bellowed in reproof. "Certainly you weren't going to start before my arrival?"

Weston smiled apologetically and started off again. Walking directly to the spot before the ceiling on which was painted the Vermiformi oil, he paused and in awe-struck tones, said:

"There! Isn't that the most magnificent thing you've ever seen? And genuine. I have had an expert at it."

There was a chorus of "Ahs and Ohs," but there was a single dissenting voice, Rentbottom's. He only said, "Bah! Peeg!"

Weston turned an aggrieved look in the little man's direction and said:

"Oh very well, Shrldlu. He is such an *impulsive man!*" he continued by way of explanation.

"Never mind him," Mrs. Halsey said. "How much do you want for that?"

"A Vermiformi ostensibly is almost priceless," Weston began.

The other battlewagon interrupted:

"I'm prepared to pay . . . anything."

"A hundred thousand dollars?"

"Two hundred," Mrs. Halsey said firmly.

"Three," Fetheringjerk said.

"Half million," Mrs. Halsey resumed, as if it were in matches she were speaking. She had the biggest voice, in money that is, so she knew the bidding would end on her note. It did. Weston bent so low he looked like he was going to kiss the high-laced black shoes she wore, and said:

"But of course you may have it."

MRS. FETHERINGJERK sniffed loudly at the last offer but it did her no good. The Halsey woman had had the last say. The attention of the rest was suddenly brought to bear on the figure of Rentbottom, standing before an old line drawing. Little exclamations of delight popped, like the smackings of bubble gum, from his lips.

Weston whispered in a voice so low they gathered around him like a football team in a huddle:

"His masterpiece! It took ten years to complete the drawing."

Rentbottom stood there, his head wagging back and forth, his lips pursed tightly, and his eyes half-closed in contemplation. Weston was first to arrive at his side.

"Steenks! But how!" the little man was saying under his breath.

Weston kicked the other surreptitiously.

Fetheringjerk angled her head and looked for a long minute at the drawing, then in a tone of bewilderment, said:

"But what is it? It just doesn't make sense."

"Mrs. Fetheringjerk!" Weston exclaimed. "I'm surprised. I thought of all people, you'd be the one to recognize its worth."

And just as Weston had figured, the other dragon took the bait.

"*She?* She couldn't tell the worth of anything unless it had a label on it," Halsey said.

Fetheringjerk's voice was shrill as she replied:

"Perhaps I don't know what it is, but I can tell what it's worth. Fifty thousand dollars to me."

It was a losing game. Halsey got it for a hundred and fifty. Weston began to wonder just how much money her husband had.

Weston turned to Rentbottom to congratulate him on how Weston's patrons were showing their appreciation, but instead let out a howl of rage. For the little artist had suddenly ripped the painting from its frame and with two swift twists of his fingers, tore the painting into four parts.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Thees! It steenks! I took ten years for to make eet. Now I do anothair in a night." Rentbottom said. And stalked off.

There was a cry of protest from Mrs. Halsey at the wanton act. And a louder shriek of strained terror at the loss of all the money, from Weston. But it was too late. The damage had been done. But from Fetheringjerk, there was only a trill of delight.

The gallery was filled with the sound of voices raised in excited chattering. Only Weston remained silent. A murderous hatred filled his soul. He wanted only to get to the back room where Rentbottom had stalked, and tear the heart out of the other.

"Excuse me," he said. "But I must see Shrldlu. I think perhaps we have offended him in some way."

But Rentbottom wasn't offended. In fact there was a wide grin on his lips. Weston started to get the load off his chest, but before he could do more than utter a sound, the other stopped him.

"Don't be a fool! You've got a real fortune in your hands. Don't throw it away. That damned fool of a woman will spend her last dollar to prove she knows more of art than Fetheringjerk. Let me work here tonight. I don't know what there is to this business of my somnambulation, but whatever it is, I'm terrific! Instead of a couple of hundred thousand dollars, we can clean up a million."

Weston was already on his way back to the main part of the gallery to give Mrs. Halsey his spiel.

Rentbottom awaited his return.

"It's all set," Weston said when he came back a few minutes later. "Now it's up to you."

"Good! Are they all gone?"

"Yes."

"Then I want to see what I did last night. I haven't seen it too well."

They both looked up at the gaudy painting on the ceiling. Rentbottom shrugged his shoulders in disappointment. He didn't recognize the artist's work. But whoever had done it was good. That he knew.

"All right, Westy," he began; it was the first time he had ever been so familiar with the other. "Now just leave me here."

RENTBOTTOM knelt at the work table and began to draw. It was as if his fingers were all thumbs. Sweat stood out on his forehead as he tried to do *something*. It was in vain. Then he began to get that drowsy feeling he knew so well. His head fell to the table and his eyes closed.

Rentbottom opened his eyes. Never had he known such a feeling of aliveness. It was as if his soul were elevated. Stepping back from the table he started for the other room. He wondered absently, who the other person was who was sleeping at the table. But it was for an instant only. He knew he had something to do. Getting the ladder he had purchased at the strange store, he opened it along the wall and ascended. On the way he had picked up a palette, and the rest of the material he needed. Swiftly he set to work. Elation swept through him as he worked. He was Michaelangelo, Da Vinci, Pacisso, all the great artists of the world, rolled into one. This thing he was doing, why Van Gogh would have been proud of it. What coloring! What composition! A masterpiece. A sentence came to his mind, "We satisfy the inner man." Who had said it? Of course. That man who had sold him the ladder. Perhaps he meant that the ladder was the vehicle . . . it had to be! It was the only explanation. Only when he was on the top of the ladder did he have this feeling of superiority. Like now. Why he

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was the greatest painter the world had ever known. Even *he* could see it.

For the first time, the watchman didn't show up. But the person on the ladder didn't know that Weston had called the agency not to send the man. And even if he had known, he wouldn't have cared. He knew only that he was painting the greatest things he had ever done. And with such swiftness! The ladder was so light. He moved it around as if it were a feather. The whole wall was covered with color when the dawn peeped through the windows of the Weston Art Galleries.

Waldro Weston walked with light, hurrying footsteps. He slipped the key into the lock, turned the knob and stepped into his art emporium. The smile of anticipation was wiped from his lips as if by a phantom hand. His rotund body held erect by a corset sagged within the elastic. His eyes, blue as a torch song dimmed in horror. But only for a second. Then, uttering a shriek, he ran toward the rear.

Rentbottom was asleep on the table.

Weston hauled him to his feet. The fat man was inarticulate in his rage. He could only utter meaningless sounds. But his hands held the promise of his unvoiced threat to annihilate the artist.

Dragging Rentbottom behind him, as though he were a sack, Weston hauled him to the center of the gallery.

"So that's how we were going to make a million!" he shouted. "So that's how you painted masterpieces. You have ruined me, you worm! And I could have had a half million dollars yesterday! Oh you . . . !"

But Rentbottom could only stare at the ceilings and walls. From end to end they were a splash of fantastic colors. And words.

DRINK SLIPPO! IT SLIDES DOWN SO GOOD. EAT FISH, WHY SMELL OF ONIONS? TRY LION CIGARETTES. THEY TICKLE THE THROAT. BETTER BE TICKLED THAN CHOKED TO DEATH. GOURMET'S HAM. IT'S IN OUR BEST ACTORS. WESTON'S GALLERIES IS THE PLACE TO GO FOR ART. OF COURSE MINSKY'S IS GOOD TOO, AND CHEAPER.

There was more, much more. But Rentbottom had seen enough. And as Weston took him by the throat, he suddenly remembered an odd phrase.

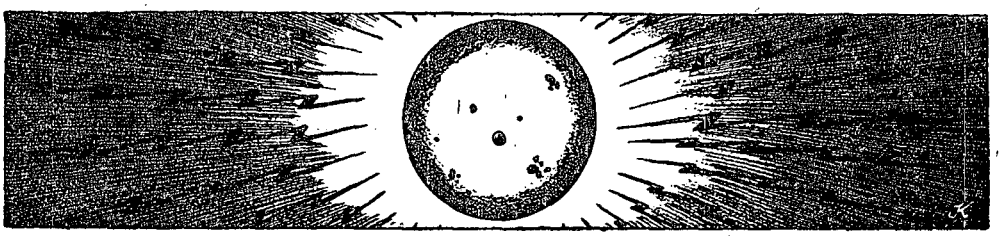
He wondered if he had uttered it. "I can be the greatest painter in the world." Well he had become that. The greatest sign painter!

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AS AMENDED BY THE ACTS OF MARCH 3, 1933, AND JULY 2, 1946

Of Fantastic Adventures, Published Monthly at Chicago, Illinois, for October 1, 1948

State of Illinois, County of Cook, ss. Before me, a notary public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Arthur T. Pullen, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of the Fantastic Adventures and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management (and if a daily, weekly, semiweekly or triweekly newspaper, the circulation), etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the acts of March 3, 1933, and July 2, 1946 (section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations), printed on the reverse of this form, to wit: 1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business manager are: Publisher, William B. Ziff, 185 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago, Ill.; Editor, Raymond A. Palmer, 185 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago, Ill.; Managing Editor, Wm. L. Hamling, 185 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago, Ill.; Business Manager, A. T. Pullen, 185 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago, Ill. 2. That the owner is: (If owned by a corporation, its name and address must be stated and also immediately thereunder the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding one percent or more of total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, the names and addresses of the individual owners must be given. If owned by a firm, company, or other unincorporated concern, its name and address, as well as those of each individual member, must be given.) Ziff-Davis Publishing Company, 185 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago, Ill.; William B. Ziff, 185 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago, Ill.; B. G. Davis, 185 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago, Ill.; A. Ziff, 185 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago, Ill.; S. Davis, 185 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago, Ill. 3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: (If there are none, so state.) Modern Woodmen of America, Rock Island, Ill. 4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him. 5. That the average number of copies of each issue of this publication sold or distributed, through the mails or otherwise, to paid subscribers during the twelve months preceding the date shown above is———————— (This information is required from daily, weekly, semiweekly, and triweekly newspapers only.) ARTHUR T. PULLEN, Business Manager. Sworn to and subscribed before me this 28th day of September, 1948. [SEAL] EVELYN BYLICA. (My commission expires April 24, 1950.)

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



The World's Heating System

By Marvin Kentley

SCIENTISTS believe that the sun's center is thirty-million degrees. Its surface is practically cold in comparison for it is only 10,000 degrees Fahrenheit. If you would look at the sun through a good telescope you would see small puffs of hot gases shoot upwards like gases from a volcano. These explosions affect our daily lives for these solar disturbances mean changes in our weather.

Until recently, the greatest trouble in making a study of the sun, was the blinding light which had to be shielded naturally, by an eclipse, or by the use of heavy filters. Eclipses come about once a year and last about eight minutes, so that wouldn't allow much time to study the sun. Also the chance that any eclipse can be observed from any given station occurs about once in 500 years. So scientists use a coronagraph, which creates its own eclipses by the use of filters. This ingenious instrument makes it possible to photograph the sun every ten seconds.

Even though the sun is ninety-three million miles away, the importance of its energy on our daily lives is tremendous. The sun is 800,000 miles in diameter and the earth is only 3,000. The sun's energy is so potent that if its diameter were to increase or decrease a few thousand miles, we might be burned to death or frozen by extreme cold. A loss of two or three degrees in the sun's surface daily continuing for a couple thousand years, would probably bring about an Ice Age upon the earth.

One of the accomplishments credited to the use of the coronagraph, has been to fix boundaries of the sun. Thousands of photographs show that although the sun is entirely gaseous, it has definite boundaries. Until recently it was believed that the sun's conora was composed of substances unknown to earth. Now careful solar explorations have indicated that nickel, calcium and iron in a high state of excitation caused by some unknown source of energy, are to be found in the corona. Man has yet to find what this source of energy may be. Perhaps this information will soon be wrested from space by the use of the unique coronagraph.

The Screwy Little Quantum

By Frances Yerxa

WE HAVE been so bombarded with superlatives in modern science, that we can no longer marvel at anything. We tend to take everything for granted no matter how marvelous it may appear at the time. The atomic bomb, radar, the V-2 rocket—all these things are taken so matter of factly, that it is discouraging just trying to arouse interest in them in anybody.

Yet we musn't feel too sorry about this. All of the things mentioned above are products of applied science. It seems to be an inevitable consequence of the applied sciences to eventually bore us no matter how great their contribution to our welfare. This is probably a perfectly natural reaction when you consider that all this gadgetry doesn't really contribute to the understanding of ourselves or of our place in the universe. To obtain a correct perspective it is necessary to go into the fundamentals of science, into the basic theories and facts, that not only fathered our present mechanistic civilization, but that will also provide the basis for any future advancements, either in the form of material progress or in the form of our better understanding what we are, where we're going, and why.

In many respects the story of modern physics reads like a fantastic child's play, similar in many respects to that delightful fantasy of Lewis Carrol, "Alice in Wonderland." Indeed the parallel is quite apt. Sir Arthur Eddington, one of the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

world's great physicists, was often fond of quoting portions of the book to illustrate particular points he was making. There are two inventions of the human mind that embrace the whole of modern physics: relativity and the quantum theory. The latter is a little older—and probably a lot more important fundamentally.

It all started with Clerk Maxwell's monumental work on the nature of electromagnetic radiation. Light was believed to be a wave-movement in a mythical ether, the medium which it was propagated in. His equations demonstrated the behavior of light remarkably well ,and the crowning confirmation of his theory was Heinrich Hertz's discovery of radio waves. Thus it seemed that the electromagnetic theory of light was firmly entrenched in the minds of all physicists. It explained phenomena so well there seemed to be no further need for more research into the matter.

But alas, there was. Consideration of light and other electromagnetic radiations as waves in a mythical ether was fine. It explained all the problems of propagation, reflection, interference and the like. But then the photo-electric effect was also discovered by Hertz. Certain materials were found to emit electrons when sprayed with light. Just how could this be explained on the basis of the wave theory? How could a wave smack an electron or an atom?

Furthermore this curious fact could not be hurdled by the electromagnetic wave theory—when the intensity of the incident light was increased. the electrons did not come out of the material at increased velocities, merely in increased numbers. One would think that the more light that shone on the emitting material the faster the electrons would come out because more energy was being poured into the stuff. But this was not so.

To further complicate matters, it was found that when the frequency of the light was varied, *then* the speed of the ejected electron changed, increasing with short-wave light, decreasing with long-wave light! How could this anomaly be clarified.

IT WAS Max Planck who finally took the dilemma and resolved it. Said he, "suppose light is not a wave in motion at all. Suppose it consists of little particles, little packets of energy which I'll call quanta. Then the whole problem is solved." This is what he did and it provided the perfect answer. Light was found to consist of little packets of energy, the quanta, whose energy content was a multiple of the frequency of the light and a constant, Planck's constant, "h."

The physicists agreed that this was a brilliant solution. As strange and as hard as it was to understand it accurately fitted the facts and it must be true. There was no other explanation. But—and here is a big "but"—light must also have wave properties to explain refraction, and interference. These phenomena cannot be explained on the basis of the particle or quantum theory.

Wave-motion is as true as quantum theory. How can light be both a wave and at the same time a particle?

The answer is not fully clarified to this day. We only know two facts. Under certain circumstances, light behaves as a wave—under others, it behaves as a particle. These facts must be reconciled to each other for they are both true. Then something happened to further the truth of the preceding statement.

Several physicists noted that light was both a wave and a particle. Electrons, protons, and all the other particles of matter *were* particles. Or were they? Let us find out, they said.

Electrons seemed to behave like particles in every way, exhibiting none of the properties of waves. Until two physicists, Davison and Germer tried an experiment! They projected electrons off a nickel crystal and by pure chance they discovered the tell-tale interference patterns always associated with wave motion. Electrons under certain circumstances did behave as waves!

This astounding discovery was confirmed everywhere and then Heisenberg, another great physicist, put the clincher to it. He said that these waves were not really waves as we think of them. They were waves of probability! And he enunciated the Principle of Uncertainty which delivered a death blow to any calm and ordinary beliefs we may have had about atomic physics.

He said, in effect, "you can know the position of an electron only so accurately and the same applies to its velocity." Thus you can never know exactly where an electron is if you know how fast it's going. Nor can you know how fast it's going if you know exactly where it is. A singular situation.

The essence of the above is that we are limited in the amount of knowledge we can secure about our particles. This principle is having far-reaching effects everywhere in the world of physics. It knocks the props from under the principle of causality. It makes it impossible to learn more than a certain limit about what we want to know because in order to learn more our gross tools disturb the thing we are studying. It is like trying to find out what a green house's dimensions are in the dark, by hurling baseballs at it and watching where they bounce off. In the act of learning we are destroying the object we are studying. So modern physics will undoubtedly deliver other surprises to us. By no means have we reached the limit of our understanding.

But we are in a better position now to realize that we can't know everything. There are some limits. Perhaps they will be overcome eventually—in fact, they must be!

* * *

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE TELEVISION MARVEL

★ **By June Lurie** ★

THE new giant, television, is on everyone's tongue today, but interest in it is confined purely to a discussion of the artistic aspects of it. What programs are available? How well do certain programs go over compared with others? Is music as fascinating or more so when the orchestras and singers are visible?

Questions like these dominate the discussion of television. The American public is so accustomed to take everything for granted that very little consideration is given to the miracle of our day, the transmission of images through space. In the early days of radio there wasn't this apathetic attitude. Everyone wanted to know how a radio functioned and the newspapers devoted columns regularly explaining that miracle in terms that the layman could understand. In addition new technical developments were discussed lavishly.

This is not true of television. Very few people seem to be interested in how a television set works and fewer care. The reasons for this are not hard to understand. We have been so bombarded by technological miracles that TV is no novelty to us sophisticates. In addition, TV is considerably more difficult to understand technically although basically anyone with an understanding of elementary radio can get a picture of how the wonder worker operates.

Since about 1880, men have devoted their lives and minds to developing the marvel that can now be had in every living room. The transmission of images through space is now an accomplished fact and has been so for the last two decades, although up until recently its hold on the imagination was not too great—this is, for the average person. Television was "just around the corner" back in '38 and '39, but the war intervened.

The present sudden acceleration in TV construction everywhere is a consequence of both public demand and present technological improvements which resulted from military developments in both theory and manufacture.

The problem is simple in TV; take an image composed of light, translate it into electrical impulses which vary in magnitude with the intensity of the light, feed these impulses to a transmitter of radio waves, pick up the radio waves, and change the electrical impulses back into light.

When first considered the problem looks insoluble, especially the part of changing images to electrical impulses, but the development of the photo-electric tube gave us the answer to that.

Now just how do you go about changing an image into an electrical impulse? You can't take a whole picture and change it into one impulse. It must be broken down into millions of little impulses so that the entire picture may be scanned.

A common comparison is this: if a picture in a newspaper is closely examined, under a magnifying lens or a microscope, it will be found that the picture consists of millions of little dots, varying in intensity. Where a part is black, the dots are most dense—and so on. TV "scanning" consists of doing much the same.

A simple form of TV is facsimile transmission, where a photograph is placed on a rotating drum, scanned by a thousandth of an inch photo-cell, the resulting impulses being fed to a transmitter, picked up, fed to a neon light of the same size, playing against a drum rotating at the same speed as the first one, synchronized with it, on which is mounted sensitive photographic paper. The result after development is a picture. That is a basic form of TV. The trouble is, only single pictures may be sent and they take a long time. It is necessary then to scan a picture completely at least sixteen times a second if motion is to be captured and preferably more than sixteen. In modern TV, complete scanning is done by the "iconoscopes" thirty-two times per second. This insures against any jerkiness such as may occasionally be detected in motion picture films, particularly the older ones.

We have still left unanswered the method of scanning. If the image is to be scanned thirty-two times a second, fraction of an inch by fraction of an inch, how is this to be accomplished? One photo-cell can't be moved that fast.

In the modern TV "camera," the "icon" tube contains a large mica screen within it on which millions of little droplets of silver are deposited, each of which acts as a separate cell. The image is allowed to fall on this screen. But that still does not help matters too much. True, we have the image broken down into millions of little parts, but how are we to tap these photo-cells individually in order to get the multitude of electrical impulses so necessary to transmission? We must have a tapping agency or a switching device that can do this very rapidly. We have.

It is simply an electron beam. It has almost no inertia. Consequently it can move with the required speed to tap the cells, all of the millions in one thirty-secondth of a second. Directed by a pair of electrical fields at right angles to each other, this marvelous beam goes over the whole image in a thirtieth of a second.

But remember this, the beam must sweep over every square inch of the picture. The picture is divided into 512 lines per inch and so the beam sweeps across each inch of the image 512 times and back and does this thirty times per second! Astounding as this may seem, it is necessary in order to get a clear picture. Anyone who has seen TV will admit it does an excellent job.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Truly this is a miracle. Each second the image tube gives out millions of electrical impulses. These are fed to a high frequency transmitter of about 12 KW power output, much like the audio modulation in a conventional transmitter.

The image is on the air!

The next step is to convert electrically modulated radio wave back into a visible picture. Almost as one would suspect the reverse procedure is followed. The wave is picked up at the receiver, amplified, and the modulations picked off the carrier. Now we have millions of electrical impulses that represent an image. Inside the receiver is a large tube, the cathode ray tube, which consists of an electron beam playing against a fluorescent surface, which glows when in touch with the beam. This beam is periodically swept over the surface in a regular scanning fashion and its intensity is controlled by the electrical impulses from the transmitter.

Thus the image is reproduced at the receiver. While the foregoing explanation is considerably simplified, it contains the basic elements of TV reproduction. The trouble is it gives no clear impression of the vast difficulties that beset putting this into a practical, workable system. It is now so simplified that anyone who can handle a soldering iron may build a receiver for himself. Many are doing this. This is the nearest analogy to the old "crystal set" days of early radio. TV is a vastly more complicated variation of conventional radio, but it still employs the basic elements.

As time goes on we can expect to see TV improve, of course. Color will be introduced commonly, although it is available now. In another ten years TV will be so common, radio will be almost forgotten!

* * *

Radar Probes The Atom

By Fran Ferris

NO SOONER is a development made in one phase of science or engineering than it appears in another. An invention in the theoretical field causes a sudden spurt in applied technology, and a new invention, vice versa, does the same thing for a theoretical science.

This reciprocity of theory and technique is of great value. It has been demonstrated many, many times in science, but nowhere more clearly or effectively than in the new application of radar to atomic and nuclear physics!

First, let us consider briefly the history of radar. In its orderly development, even before the outbreak of the war, radar techniques employed wavelengths in the neighborhood of a hundred meters with a frequency to be measured in hundreds of megacycles.

As the war gave this study a terrific impetus, particularly in the battle of Britain, and later in the defense of the German cities, the wavelengths of radar generators were pushed steadily down. First it was ten meters, then a meter, then ten centimeters, and finally, we were employing some three centimeter stuff for the bombardments of the cities of Nazi Germany. The reason for this decrease in wavelength was due to the fact that electromagnetic waves behave more and more like light as their wavelength is decreased. In fact, light itself, as everyone knows, is actually an electromagnetic wave. And since radar is based on the transmission, reflection and detection of these waves, it is only natural that the more they behave like light the more value they will have. And so radar wavelengths between ten centimeters and three centimeters were used by the Allies to get clear pictures of German cities from great heights and through deep overcasts, just as the Germans employed the same radar techniques to guide their anti-aircraft fire against allied aircraft.

Eventually the allies developed tubes capable of generating wavelengths below three centimeters. And naturally they expected that still clearer pictures would appear on the oscilloscopes when this equipment was employed.

Well, the pictures did appear—and clearly—with one qualification. If the weather happened to be damp, if there was much fog, the scopes showed hardly anything! What could conceivably account for this strange development?

Before we go on, it is wise to point out that this is the major reason why three centimeter radar and a little above, are still regarded as the ideal for detection purposes, even though shorter wavelengths can be generated. And with these wavelengths very clear pictures can be obtained as anyone will testify who has seen photographs of radar screens.

It is also necessary to discuss another fact, before the answer to our problem becomes clarified. It is a known fact, from the consequences of the quantum theory, that radiation is not only possessed of a wave nature but also of a particle nature. The particle nature manifests itself more strongly as we deal with shorter wavelengths. There is the famous Planck formula which tells us that radiation occurs in little packets of energy called photons. These photons have varying amounts of energy dependent upon only one factor—their wavelength. There is a correlation between wavelength and energy.

The shorter the wavelength, the greater the energy, says Max Planck's theory. In order for

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ordinary matter to react with electromagnetic waves another consequence is necessary. The size of the matter must bear a similar relationship to wavelength of the radiation.

NOW let us gather the facts. Radar waves are effectively absorbed by the water vapor in the air—that is, assuming the waves are short enough. We spoke of radar waves below three centimeters in wave length, and it is now obvious that they must contain packets of energy, photons, of just the right magnitude to interact with them. And so, the water vapor simply soaks up the radar waves much as a sponge soaks up water. This then precludes the use of wavelengths shorter than three centimeters in general radar work.

Offhand we might conclude that nothing worthwhile has been discovered. On the contrary! A scientific fact of the first order is now known. We have another tool for the probing of the atom! With radar waves we can reach into and explore the mysterious atom.

For example, a tube may be filled with ammonia gas. Radar waves are passed through this gas. It is found that certain component frequencies of the radar waves are absorbed by the gas. What does this tell us? By a series of complicated calculations, the relationship between the atoms in the molecules of gas can be ascertained clearly.

Already using this method it has been found that the formula for water should really be written H-O-H, instead of H_2O, because the radar waves have shown that the two hydrogen atoms cling side by side to the oxygen atom.

Similarly, other things are learned about the placement of the atoms in a given molecule. It has been learned that the atoms spin and rotate in the molecule!

All of these facts are of inestimable value. We can only guess from the little work that has been done that the future promises to be rich and ripe.

Up until now most of the probing of the atom has been done in one of two ways. Either it is done with short waves of light or x-rays, or infrared rays, all of which tell us a lot about the structure of the atom. Or particles are shot into the atom, particles of other atoms, like neutrons, protons and electrons. This, too, helps.

But now there is another tool of equal value. We go into the atom with radio waves!

The foregoing discussion is an interesting case of what was mentioned in the opening of this article. Applied science now often makes great contributions to theoretical science.

Engineering, with its enormous capabilities, provides the scientist with the tools of his trade. Science seems to be stepping out of the simple laboratory stage and into the full-sized industrial plant stage.

No longer is it possible for a scientist working alone in a little laboratory to discover the secrets of the universe. Now that statement is not quite true, either. Actually what physics needs today is more men of the caliber of Planck and Einstein. These men were not gadgeteers. Their tools were their minds. Laboratory technicians are a dime a dozen. The real theoretician is the man who can probe nature with his brain. Unfortunately they are the hardest to find. They are few and far between.

The Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton is doing its best to provide men of this type. But such men are born, not made. And all they need is a pencil, a paper and a brain!

GRID-BUSTING

By Jon Barry

IT'S always easy to look back on something and say, "I should have done so-an-so . . ." Hindsight is a lot easier than foresight. But human beings, being what they are, find it difficult to resist the temptation. Consequently the subject of this article is worth considering. As a matter of fact, very likely it will be of use some time in the future.

The Air Forces of the allied nations in the last war must be walking around with very red faces when they think about the subject of "grid-busting." Every modern country in the world bases its economy and its productivity on tools to produce the things it needs for peace—and war. These tools require power to drive them and that means millions of electric motors, the motors obtaining their energy from electric power lines connected to electric power plants. Nothing is more obvious. Electric power plants are the heart and soul of a nation. Without them, nothing can be done.

With that in mind, ask yourself the same question that must embarrass the military authorities; "Why, in the last war, instead of the bombing of industrial plants to knock them out, was not the bombing concentrated purely on Germany's—and Japan's—electric power generating stations?"

That is the sixty-four dollar question. And so far there has been no satisfactory answer. The authorities hem and haw—but they don't answer.

In Germany, as in the United States—and in all the other major countries of the world—the country is covered with several hundred electric power generating stations, huge assemblies for the most part of buildings and coal piles that can't be concealed. In some instances the stations use the water power and there you find

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dams. The sum and substance of it is this: all that would be necessary to knock out the country as a productive unit would be to bomb and destroy these power plants. With the power plants out—the wheels of industry stop.

It is our belief that if German and Japanese power plants had been bombed, the war would have ended much sooner. The plants' locations were well known to everybody. Why this was not done is a mystery that only the big brass can ever answer. If their answer is "so that the country after defeat would be able to recover more quickly," we say, "bosh!" It is easier to build a few hundred power plants or rebuild them, than thousands of factories and railroad terminals. Yet the knockout of industry is much more complete and devastating.

The name "grid-busting" for this sort of military action comes from the fact, that almost all of the power plants of a country are linked together in huge networks or grids that are so interconnected, that the failure of one unit does not mean the elimination of power. Another power plant supplies the missing energy until the original one can get back into action.

The United States is covered with such a grid—actually about fourteen of fifteen huge networks that supply the major part of our electric power. As time goes on, even these large networks or grids are being joined together, so that if necessary power can be delivered effectively from California to New York. Of course, this simply means passing energy from one station to another.

If any foreign power should ever attack us, electrical engineers have pointed out this dreadful vulnerability. It would mean naturally that most of the power generating stations would have to be destroyed at once. Fortunately, the United States is big, and that means it would be a difficult task for any potential attacker. Yet it could be done.

This still does not explain why Germany and Japan weren't beaten in such a fashion because they are both small and it would have been a comparatively simple task to organize a mass bombing attack on them.

In light of this evidence, it behooves us to look to our state of preparation on this matter. A terrible vulnerability exists here. It doesn't take complete devastation to knock out an electrical generating station either—a burst steam pipe from a bomb fragment, a fallen beam in the high voltage section, a fragment of metal in any rotating machine—and puff!—it's done—for a time at least.

Perhaps the successful utilization of atomic power will help us avoid this dreadful possibility. Such plants could be put underground much more easily than a plant that consumes coal. Time will give us the answer. Let us pray that we are never deprived of our electrical grid—oddly enough we'd roast!

* * *

MAYAN TEMPLES

★ **By L. A. Burt** ★

ELEVEN Mayan temples were discovered in the jungles of southern Mexico in 1946. The place is called Bonampak, and the temples are believed to have been built around 600 A.D. The architectural beauty of the temples show that a highly cultural civilization once flourished in that territory.

The temples were found by Mr. Healey, archeologist and moving picture photographer. He had spent over two years traveling through the jungles looking for Indians of pure Mayan descent to photograph. While he was staying with the Lacandones Indians, he noticed that the men of the tribe disappeared for some time. All they would tell him was that they had gone on a pilgrimage to some temples. Finally he was able to bribe them with guns and ammunition to lead him to seventeen different sites occupied by forty-eight buildings never before seen by any white man.

It took several days to reach the ruins, traveling through jungles, rivers, and mountains by foot. The biggest temple is called El Tigre, which means "mountain lion," or "jaguar," and as if it were prearranged, a live jaguar bounded out of the temple as Mr. Healey entered. That pleased the Lacandones, for to them that was proof that the temple's guardian was on the job.

The temples contained three rooms full of paintings. There were brightly colored frescoes that were still fresh and new-looking. Two elaborately carved alter stones and three record stones were found. One record stone is eighteen feet high and weighs over four tons. There are life-size paintings of warriors and kings which show their plumed headdresses and ceremonial apparel. Musical instruments that were used 1,500 years ago are also represented. There are long, thin horns similar to those used in Tibet, and rattles made of turtle shells, and drums three feet high.

According to the pictures, the kings and priests wore costumes made of jaguar or deer skins, richly ornamented with jade. The common people wore cotton with figures of men, monsters, and astronomical figures dyed on them.

The inscriptions on the altar stones have not yet been deciphered, but they are being studied by archeologists and all others interested in the earliest civilizations on the North American continent.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BIOLOGICAL WARFARE

By Cal Webb

IN WORLD War III, instead of dying in a riot of deafening hell because of the atomic bomb, billions of people may be killed by tiny, antihuman weapons that give no warning. There may be no destruction of property; just silent corpses, testimony of invisible germs and rays and poisons that kill quickly and silently. These killers are invisible, microscopic, and capable of spreading to reach even the most protected enemy. They are easily prepared, requiring none of the enormous cost and complications in preparing the atomic bomb. The largest nation with its supply of atomic bombs is helpless against even the smallest foe which is competent in biological warfare.

The most powerful poison known to man, a crystalline toxin, was perpared for the first time by the Special Division of the Chemical Warfare Service during the last war. It is so potent that 15 millionths of a gram—an amount too small to see—is enough to kill a man. At this rate one gram is enough to kill seven million men. This mass killer is the toxin responsible for the disease known as botulism, a form of ptomaine poisoning. This toxin is produced from the bacteria called "clostridium botulinum" which is in improperly canned foods. It causes a paralysis of the nervous system. Spraying water or food supplies would wipe out people by the thousands. The enemy could take over a country still intact. To poison a whole nation, a squadron of planes spraying a fine mist into a cloud of rain, could damage the water and food supply of a nation, resulting in silent, paralyzing death for millions. It is the cold-blooded silence of this new weapon, that makes it seem inhuman. Death in the noise and hysteria of battle seems more natural and, if possible, easier to take. This gentle, painless paralysis is less glamorous than being ripped apart by flying steel and flame throwers. It is inconsistent to talk about the horrors of gases and biological warfare and condone atomic warfare. There is no humanity about any weapon. There is no humanity in war. The first World War was a chemist's war; the second, a physicist's; and the third will perhaps be a biologist's war.

* * *

GOING—GONE!

By Marty Mesner

UNEXPLAINED disappearances are no novelty in this world today. Nor have they been in the past. It seems that each year many persons vanish from the ken of this world, "spurlos versenkt," as they say, or lost without trace. The Fortean Society has given some rather unusual explanations of these happenings and for all we know, they may be right regardless of how hard it is to believe that they are.

It is interesting to consider some of the more obscure cases of disappearances—which *have* been accounted for. These are even stranger than those for whom no accounting is possible! And they leave one with the feeling that "things are not what they seem"—"there is more betwixt Heaven and Earth than thou hast dreamt of, Horatio." Consider the vanishment of Dr. Charles L. Sendby about twenty years ago.

Dr. Sendby was a specialist surgeon, his strong field being brain surgery. He was married, with a

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wife and two children. His practice was large and lucrative and he was known all over the world for some of his outstanding surgical miracles. He was a consultant to a number of prominent New York hospitals and he maintained, in addition to his offices, a well equipped laboratory in which he did some really significant research, much of which was published after his disappearance.

On the evening of July 7, 1926, Dr. Sendby left his office, his nurse testified, to visit in his laboratory, where she said, he expected a visitor. This occured at nine o'clock. He had his nurse telephone his wife that he would be a little later than usual, but there was no evidence of alarm or unusualness in this procedure. Often Dr. Sendby did the same thing. That was the last ever seen of him —almost!

The disappearance was mentioned in the newspapers, an intensive search was instituted for the man, the wife and children were well provided for by the doctor's estate, and the matter quickly vanished from the public's attention. No further consideration was given it and in the files of the New York Police department, Dr. Sendby was marked "missing." Now the files of the department are full of statements like that, and ordinarily no one gives the affair another thought. It is assumed that the authorities have exhausted every possibility of locating the man and if they fail it is not due to negligence on their part. And it is true. The authorities *do* make every possible human effort to locate such missing individuals.

And so for almost twenty years the strange disappearance of Dr. Sendby was forgotten by all but his relatives and even they considered that he had probably met his death at the hands of unknown assailants, he had been robbed and his body successfully hidden.

Then, during the late war, something occured which cast a new and inexplicable light on the whole case.

It was the practice of the British Army to maintain throughout the war, regular military patrols, in British East Africa though the possibilities of enemy action in those territories was regarded as most improbable. Nevertheless no chances were taken.

A patrol of British soldiers led by Captain John Sandley late of His Majesty's Grenadiers, a veteran of much North African warfare, and a man of unimpeachable qualities and talents, stumbled by pure chance on a solution to the bizarre disappearance of Dr. Sendby. "Solution" is not the word. No real explanation was ever found, but the point is that Dr. Sendby did not "vanish."

The patrol of thirty soldiers was making its way through a dense stretch of jungle vegetation, almost impassable to any but lightly clad and lightly equipped men. They stumbled on a native Swahili village a not unusual occurrence. In fact this village looked exactly like any one of a hundred similar ones through which they had passed numerous times before.

There would be no lingering ordinarily, for the patrol had a lot of territory to cover, but in this case, the unusual fact, that the tribe's witch doctor was *white*, made Captain Sandley reconsider and investigate!

The witch doctor was a white man—not an albino. He was the exact duplicate of a conventional British or American business man, aged about fifty-five, well preserved, alert, intelligent. He spoke English and Swahili, both expertly. He knew he was an Anglo-American and he had a great acquaintance with medical practices.

He had no recollection of how he had gotten into the village. He had been with the villagers a long time. Captain Sandley pursued the investigation with diligence, thinking perhaps that the man was a German spy, but he changed his mind rapidly as he got to know the strange witch doctor. By close questioning of the natives, he learned that the man had been found badly injured from a head wound, in the jungle, almost lifeless.

The natives had cared for him and nursed him to health and then gradually he had become content to become a member of the tribe by adoption. Eventually he became the natives' medicine man. He told Sandley that he had an instinctive recollection of medical practices, and, as best he could, he plied the natives with the effects of his long-remembered training. As time went on and the efficacy of his remedies became apparent to the tribesmen their trust in him became absolute. He chose to remain with the natives.

Sandley reported the incident to his superiors. Incredulous at first, they came to believe him when he submitted detailed evidence in the form of birth marks, etc. A check with British missing persons bureaus disclosed the absence of no one such as described by Sandley. By chance, the affair was mentioned at an American Officers' Mess and one of the officers who had been on the police force at the time of the Sendby disappearance, told of it. The matter was thoroughly and completely investigated and before long an expedition determined that indeed, Dr. Sendby was the strange medicine man. He refused repatriation when told who he was and because his family had scattered no other mention was made of the case.

Try as they would it was impossible for them to determine just how the doctor managed to disappear to Africa. He had no memory whatsoever of having made the journey. Various hypotheses were suggested, none of which was entirely satisfactory. All ideas of shanghaiing or kidnapping which seem on a first consideration, so logical had to be discarded. Any mystic explanation is much sounder in light of what the doctor remembered despite all efforts to convince him he must be in error.

* * *

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SACRED CROCODILE

★ **By Pete Bogg** ★

THE crocodile is a four footed animal belonging to both land and water. She produces and hatches eggs on land, and spends most of the day on land, but at night returns to the water for it is much warmer than the open air and dew. During the four most wintry months the crocodile eats nothing. Of all the animals, this creature grows from the smallest beginning to the biggest bulk. The egg is no bigger than a goose egg, but crocodiles sometimes grow to be more than seventeen cubits long. They have eyes like a pig and large tusky teeth, but unlike other beasts, they have no tongues, nor can they move the lower jaw. They have strong claws and a tough scaly back that can't be pierced. They are blind while in the water.

Most birds and beasts are afraid of the crocodile. Since he gets his living in the water, he gets his mouth and teeth full of leeches, then he comes out on dry land and opens his mouth. The trochilus is the bird that enters his mouth and cleans his teeth and eats the leeches. That pleases the crocodile, so he never harms the trochilus.

For some Egyptians the crocodiles are sacred animals. They select certain ones and tame them and hang ornaments in their ears, and put beautiful gold bracelets on their ankles. They are given special food and victims are sacrificed to them. When they die, they are embalmed and buried in sacred tombs.

The Noisy Ghost On Cape Cod

★ **By Milton Matthew** ★

THIS noisy haunt made himself heard in the 1930's. A man and his wife, both college professors, had gone to Cape Cod to spend their vacation. They rented a cottage and hoped to have peace and quiet because they had some serious writing to do and did not want any distractions. However, the quiet they had hoped for was broken the first night of their stay in the house, and continued during the next four months, when they left.

The first night the wife went to bed early and the husband sat up to do some writing. But he was continuously disturbed by a tapping sound. He thought it was his wife and called to her asking her to please be more quiet. She informed him that she was making no sound and that she was unable to sleep because of it. It sounded like someone tapping on a brick wall with a cane. They looked all around to find the source of the noise but could find nothing to account for it.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The next night they were sitting up late down stairs and heard the same noise again. They took a flashlight and went outside and searched the wall and still found no clue. No human or animal was seen, and yet it was impossible for man or beast to take cover so quickly, for there was no place to hide. This same sound occurred at least fifty times during the summer, usually around ten o'clock at night. They did everything they could to discover the cause. They lay in wait in the bushes as ten o'clock drew near, but the taps stopped the moment they sprang out. They examined the bricks and the walk minutely, and finally they gave up. But this wasn't the only mystery connected with their Cape Cod cottage. Several nights the husband heard things moving about his bedroom just after he retired. Once he heard the sound of a newspaper swishing across the room. Turning on the light revealed that there was no paper in the room and there was no breeze. As time went by the sounds became louder. One night just as his head hit the pillow, he heard what he thought must be a rolling pin fall to the floor and roll clear across the room till it clattered against the opposite wall and came to rest. He sprang from his bed and switched on the light, but again there was nothing unusual to be seen.

By the end of their third week in the cottage, they heard footfalls tramping throughout the house day and night. It was no light, muffled footstep, but the heavy tramp, tramp, as of a man who might be wearing heavy leather boots. If they were working down stairs, they heard it above them. If they were up stairs, they heard the walking going on on the ground floor.

THE next manifestation of haunting was much more than in the form of sounds. One night the professor had to refer to his reference books for some information. These books he had stored in a shed that was joined to the pantry. He had not been in the shed for some time, and when he opened the door and turned on the light, he was attacked by the most ferocious big, brown moths he had ever seen. There was a big swarm of them that dashed at his face like mad hornets. He could not understand how they could get into the shed, for it hadn't been opened for some time, and it was completely sealed except for the door that led into the pantry. He closed the door quickly and called his wife. When he opened it again to show her, there was not a moth to be seen, and there was no way for them to escape. He searched every crevice and beat the walls with a broom, but found not one insect. They both agreed that it was the work of a ghost. That night, lights kept going on and off throughout the house.

The climax to all sounds came one night when they both heard a tremendous crash that sounded like a grand piano being dropped several feet onto a cement floor. They rushed to the garage expecting to find the roof caved in, but not even a book had fallen from the shelf. Within the next two weeks, they heard this "grand slam" three more times. But they never could find a thing that could account for it. It happened one time when their guests heard it, and they agreed that the sound was so terrific that it could be heard for ten miles. The sound of foot-steps going about the house was very annoying, and the very scientific house-guests were glad to leave without giving even a remote explanation as to the cause of the noises.

When the summer vacation came to a close, the tenants left to go back to their work at the university. The perplexing problem was always in their minds, for they were unable to find a reasonable explanation for the disturbances they had experienced during their four months of occupancy in the Cape Cod cottage.

EGYPTIAN BURIAL CUSTOMS

★ **By Walter Lathrop** ★

THE very early Egyptians made provisions for their dead to supply their needs in the hereafter. In opening prehistoric graves, supplies have been found that would carry the person through the normal daily routine. The food offerings were burned to ashes in a burning plant at the entrance of the cemetery, then they were placed in urns, sometimes as many as fifty jars of ashes have been found in one grave. Jars of beer, ointment, cakes, bread, even toilet articles, such as mascara, malachite, hairpins and combs, were placed in the tombs. In the case of men, weapons were found, such as knives, lances, daggers, stone maces and flaying knives. These offerings were placed in a little walled in place built around the grave. There was a small tunnel opening into this outer court, which the offerings passed through or for the spirit of the dead. The amount of offering usually exceeded the space in the court and dozens of jars were stacked against the walls of the grave. Some common graves at Tarkhan had less impressive covers. They were covered with a low dome of sand and gypsum. The larger tombs of the 1st dynasty were made of brick. The walls were built to look exactly as the dwelling house of the deceased.

Tombs of the IVth dynasty were found which had passages leading down from the tomb to the subterranean house which had storerooms full of provisions. Sometimes there would only be a

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

small tube in a rock to allow the soul to go in and out. The offerings in most of the tombs were objects that would follow the daily service of the man when alive: water to purify, incense, perfumes, and ointments. Then would be placed a meal of beer and cakes. After that, a mouth wash of natron. Next would be objects of relaxation such as paintings and carvings. After that a heavier meal with meat, then a lighter meal of fruit and wine.

The Pyramid texts, the oldest group of spells and prayers, tell of the dismemberment of the bones and then putting them back together after the flesh had been stripped from them. Proof that this custom did exist has been found repeatedly in uncovering prehistoric burials. Quite often the skull was not with the body, but set apart from it on a stone adorned with clay ornaments. In one case a gold necklace was found around the base of the skull. In one grave the skull was not present, and in its place was a tray of small vases proving that the skull had never been in the grave. This could be explained by the Nigerian custom of cutting off the head of the corpse and keeping it as a remembrance in the home where offerings were made to it at the time of family festivals. Hands were often removed and laid across the body. Sometimes the fingers were scattered about or tied together in a bundle. Sometimes the whole body was taken apart, the bones sorted for length, the ribs and long bones in one pile and the shorter ones in another. In IIIrd dynasty graves, bones have been found wrapped separately in strips of linen cloth. In one grave, the bones found had been split, with the ends gouged out. This had not been done with malice for vases containing valuable ornaments were standing around the skull. Perhaps this corpse had been an important person in life, and perhaps his followers had eaten as much of him as possible to retain the divinity that had been with them. The higher station the man held in life, the more desirable was he for eating. King Halfdan was a king during the good years and when he died his body was cut to pieces and a part of it buried in each province for the purpose of fertilizing the land. In Central Africa, a red paste was made which was eaten by all friends of the tribe. The paste was made of old people who had been dried and smoked.

In the very earliest times the body was buried bare or had a skin cape wrapped around it. The linen cloth did not come till later. Perhaps not till the 1st dynasty was the body of the queen wrapped in fine linen, the wrapping and padding of the members to the fullness of the living form was not done till the IIIrd dynasty. At that time a body was well embalmed at Meydum. From that time till the XIIth dynasty there were many ways of caring for the body. At that time there came the regular system of wrapping that lasted to Roman times. First pads were laid on to level the body, then about twenty turns of the binder from head to foot; more pads, then twenty more turns of binder. Then comes the fancy Y-forked tie made of two long strips of cloth knotted under the feet, then over the feet and up the front with knots on the shins and on the abdomen, parting over the shoulders, and then tied again behind the neck. Then there were more pads and spiral turns, and finally a spiral binder of fifty turns. Then there was the shroud over all tucked in at the head and feet with the corners tied together. This method was so similar to the wrapping of the XXVIth and the Roman age, that it shows that there were fixed rules for this process which were carefully regarded. The outside bandages were painted with white stucco so that the painted on features would show up more plainly.

One mode of burial in the Ist dynasty seems to have been to simply throw the naked corpse into an open grave, as in some cases no trace of cloth was found. The brick work of the graves showed that the bricks were not dry at the time of burial, proof that it was done in haste. The large graves of the servants of royalty, that were opened in 1922, show that the servants were buried alive. Perhaps they were knocked unconscious before being thrown in the grave. At Sedment, some graves of the IXth dynasty were uncovered showing that the bodies were packed in wood ashes. In other places bones were found that were coated over with mud that had been mixed with gums which stuck to the bones to form the outline of a body.

The Coldest Spot

★ **By A. Morris** ★

IN THE Arctic and Antarctic regions it gets so cold, sometimes eighty degrees below zero, that your breath freezes when you speak. If you are facing the wind and blow your breath out, it freezes the tiny moisture droplets and as the wind blows them by your ear, you can hear the tiny frozen crystals brushing against each other.

The men of the Byrd expedition sometimes found it difficult to keep a kerosene lamp burning. The oil becomes so thick and mushy that it won't soak into the wick, so the flame goes out. And even though the flame is burning, it is sometimes so cold that ice crystals form on the inside of the chimney.

A reindeer running across the ice gives off a cloud of fog that looks like the vapor trail of a plane. The fog is the same thing that we see

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

when we blow our breath out on a cold day. The body heat of the deer given off as he runs, in the form of perspiration, condenses in the cold air and turns to vapor.

If you should drop some mercury in the snow, it hardens like metal and you can pick it up in one chunk. Ordinarily, if you try to pick it up, it separates and runs away in little balls.

Such intense cold tends to sharpen our eyesight. Distant mountains appear close-by, and we can see small objects at three times the distance that we could ordinarily see them.

* * *

MEET THE AUTHORS

(*Concluded from page 2*)

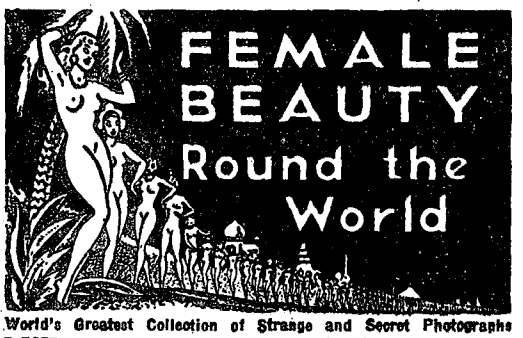
a lot of fun for everyone, including, he devoutly hopes, the reader. At the typewriter, he first sets his sights on entertainment, leaving educational preachments in the class room, where he feels they will be better appreciated.

Aside from writing among Mr. Myers' interests is a certain, eager-faced preoccupation with cures for poison oak, an indisposition from which he constantly suffers, since, according to his own words, he hasn't the good sense to stay out of the stuff. In the heat of the day, when plagued with a good, healthy rash, he claims to be the exponent of a rhumba that would have even Carmen Miranda in a frenzy of envy. If anyone knows a sure fire cure he would like to hear about it.

Bringing fantasy fiction into the picture, Mr. Myers explains his predilection for the form by recalling the evenings back in his childhood when the youngsters in his neighborhood used to gather around the fireplace at his home for the express purpose of scaring the daylights out of each other with ghost stories. He suspects that all true fantasy lovers must have similar evenings somewhere in their backgrounds which cause them to turn to this type of reading. Those fireside yarns, he says, were the finest, most blood curdling stories in the world, and he is certain they will never be topped by any writer in any time. He only wishes he could remember a few of them.

Looking on the dark, technical side of things, he frowns deeply on the problem of punctuation, which he considers one of the great mysteries of all time. If he had his way the whole thing would be reduced to a simple series of dots and dashes, which system he has practiced for years in his personal correspondence. Without complaint, he adds with a certain show of complacency.

If he may be permitted, Charley would like to ask just one thing of his readers; if any of them, anywhere, should ever run into a permanent, earth-bound embodiment of Toffee, he would be pleased to receive the young lady's name, address and telephone number by direct wire. He finds that he has created a Frankenstein in reverse.



World's Greatest Collection of Strange and Secret Photographs

NOW you can travel round the world with the most daring adventurers. You can see with your own eyes the weirdest peoples on earth. You witness the strangest customs of the red, white, brown, black and yellow races. You attend their startling rites, their mysterious practices. They are all assembled for you in these five great volumes of **THE SECRET MUSEUM OF MANKIND.**

600 LARGE PAGES

Here is the world's Greatest Collection of Strange and Secret Photographs. Here are Exotic Photos from Europe, Primitive Photos from Africa, Torture Photos from Asia. Strange Photos from Oceania and America, and hundreds of others. There are almost **600 LARGE PAGES of Strange and Secret Photographs,** each page 57 square inches in size.

1,000 PHOTOS

You see actual courtship practiced in every quarter of the world. You see magic and mystery in queer lands where the foot of a white man has rarely trod. You see Oriental modes of marriage and slavery in China, Japan, India, etc. Through the intimacy of the camera you witness the exotic habits of every continent and the strangest customs, in America, Europe, etc. You are bewildered by these large pages of **ONE THOUSAND PHOTOGRAPHS,** including 130 full-page photos and thrilled by the hundreds of short stories that describe them.

Contents of 5-Volume Set
VOLUME 1
The Secret Album of Africa
VOLUME 2
The Secret Album of Europe
VOLUME 3
The Secret Album of Asia
VOLUME 4
The Secret Album of America
VOLUME 5
The Secret Album of Oceania

5 PICTURE PACKED VOLUMES

THE SECRET MUSEUM OF MANKIND consists of five picture packed volumes (solidly bound together for convenient reading).

Specimen Photos
Dress and Undress Round the World
Various Secret Societies
Strange Crimes, Criminals
Omens, Totems & Taboos
Mysterious Customs
1,000 STRANGE AND SECRET PHOTOS

Dip into any one of these volumes, and as you turn its pages, you find it difficult to tear yourself away. Here, in story and unusual photo, is the **WORLD'S GREATEST COLLECTION OF STRANGE AND SECRET PHOTOGRAPHS,** containing everything from Female Beauty Round the World to the most Mysterious Cults and customs. These hundreds and hundreds of large pages will give you days and nights of thrilling instruction.

SEND NO MONEY

Simply sign and mail the coupon. Remember, each of the 5 Volumes is 9¼ inches high, and, opened, over 6 feet wide! Remember also that this 5-Volume Set formerly sold for $10. And it is bound in expensive "lifetime" cloth. Don't put this off. Fill out the coupon, drop it in the next mail, and receive this huge work at once.

Metro Publications, Dept. 6362, 383 Broadway, N. Y. 13, N. Y.
Send me "The Secret Museum of Mankind" (5 great volumes bound together). I will pay postman $1.98, plus postage on arrival. If not delighted, I will return books in 5 days for full refund of $1.98.

Name .....
Address .....
City .....Zone.....State.....

☐ CHECK HERE if you are enclosing $1.98, thus saving mailing costs. Same Money-Back Guarantee. Canadian and Foreign Orders—$2.50 in Advance.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

READER'S PAGE

A PLEASANT SURPRISE

Sirs:

I was pleasantly surprised to find another "Toffee" story in the November issue of FA.

Could Charles F. Myers be a pen name of Thorne Smith? They employ almost identical styles and subject matter, and although I am an avid Thorne Smith fan I could easily mistake Mr. Myers' story for one by Smith. Let's have more "Toffee" stories soon!

"Dimensions Unlimited" was the usual Livingston best that I could not put down until I had finished with it. Lots of action.

The shorts were swell this issue, but I wish to put in my two pesos worth and really congratulate you on the cover. At least this gal was covered with a little more than a French-type bathing suit. It would be swell if all the covers followed the pattern of the November issue. Don't call me a kill-joy for campaigning for just a little less love interest either, as I don't exactly avoid the gals myself!

George Verschelden, Jr.,
8th & Maple Sts.,
St. Marys, Kansas.

We're answering your request for a new 'Toffee" story right quick, George. Matter of fact, in this very issue. And not only that, you'll be able to read all about Charles Myers if you haven't already, by turning to page 2. This will answer your question about Myers and Thorne Smith. They are two separate people, but allied spirits, you might say. We're mighty proud of Myers, and why shouldn't we be—your favorite magazine discovered him! And we also think that Thorne Smith would have liked to read some of the "Toffee" stories himself.....Ed.

BEING LET DOWN

Sirs:

I have been a reader of FA and AS for almost ten years. In this time I have read many truly great stories published in your pulps, but more and more I am beginning to feel I am being let down with each new issue of FA and her companion magazine. For one big reason.

It seems that your stories are written for ten and twelve year olds, although you do, I must admit, come up with a good yarn now and then.

I was quite discouraged with Lee Francis' new story in the December issue, "Outlaws of Corpus." The only good thing about it was Malcolm Smith's superb cover painting.

Speaking of illustrations, I was glad to see Virgil Finlay in the December issue. As for Rod Ruth, a great big no . . .

In closing I'd like to say that I agree with Lowman and Weitzenhoffer on Shaver.

Arvil F. Bail,
Sheridan, Oregon.

We have found that the readers of FA range in age from ten to sixty, Arvil. Which means we've got a pretty good cross-section of the science-fantasy public. To say, however that our stories are slanted at any one age group is not true. And we'd like to add here that we've also found that the younger readers of science-fantasy fiction can hold their own mentally with older readers. A fact which proves that stf fans are in the groove! You'll understand better what we mean when you read the following letter, which presents the younger fan's viewpoints.....Ed.

FA AN INSPIRATION

Sirs:

I decided that it is about time for a teen-age fan to write in, so I'm doing so. I'm 14, and read FA and AS avidly. I read them for three main reasons, as follows:

1. The stories are very interesting.

2. By reading the stories, if close attention is given them, great scientific theories eventually evolve. Many of your stories seem almost inspired. They are based on good plots. A very

LAW STUDY AT HOME for business Success and LARGER PERSONAL EARNINGS. 40 years expert instruction—over 114,000 students enrolled. LL.B. Degree awarded. All text material furnished. Easy payment plan. Send for FREE BOOK—"Law and Executive Guidance"—NOW.

AMERICAN EXTENSION SCHOOL OF LAW
Dept. 11-R 646 N. Michigan Ave. Chicago 11, Ill.

Final Blackout, Hubbard....$3.00
Death's Deputy, Hubbard.... 2.50 } All 3 for $8.50
Slaves of Sleep, Hubbard.... 3.00
Skylark of Space, Smith....$3.00 } All 3 for $8.50
Triplanetary, Smith..... 3.00 } copies especially
Skylark Three, Smith..... 3.00 } autographed by author
Any single item from combination sold separately.
Choice of 1 item FREE with order of $5 and over.
1. Ship of Ishtar } by
2. Moon Pool } Merritt,
3. Conquest of Moon Pool } F. N. Version
JULIUS UNGER 6401 24th Ave., Brooklyn 4, N. Y.

BOOKLETS. The kind grownups like. Each one of these booklets is POCKET SIZE, also contains 8 ILLUSTRATIONS, and is full of fun and entertainment. 12 of these joke booklets, ALL DIFFERENT, shipped prepaid upon receipt of $1.00, or 24 BOOKLETS ALL DIFFERENT shipped prepaid for $2, cash or money order. No orders sent C.O.D. Print name and address and mail to: Treasure Novelty Co., Dept. 36-B, 28 Cooper Station, N. Y. 3, N. Y.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

important factor to any story.

3. I hope to be a stf writer myself some day.

I just finished reading the December issue of FA. Here are my opinions of the stories.

"Fountain of Change" by Geier and Shaver took first place. A very good story. Not the best you've had by far, but I think this certainly should have been the cover story.

I think there has been too much criticism of Shaver's work. I will say that since he has quit the "Shaver Mystery" his style has improved greatly. Geier, of course, is excellent.

"Outlaws of Corpus" by Lee Francis I put in second place. It was interesting, but not original.

"Brainstorm" by Alex Blade ran a close third. Toward the end it was almost a wee bit too much of a detective story . . .

"A Place Like Eden" by Hickey would have been a better story if it had been longer.

"Gimme Finds the Gimmick" was a rather poor Livingston story.

Cover was excellent. Good for Smith.

I'll close saying that I would like to have correspondence with any fans who would care to write me. The gals too.

Edward Lee Bailey, Jr.,
P. O. Box 85,
Webster, Texas.

Thanks for the letter, Ed, and we'll look forward to hearing from you again.....Ed.

ON FA COVERS

Sirs:

I have been a reader of FA and AS for many years. A few months ago I began to notice in the reader's section, letters from some people who say that the covers on your magazine, and some of the interior illustrations, are obscene because they depict scantily clad women.

I think it is absurd to make such a statement. At least fifty percent of the great "art" in the world today would have to be classed as obscene then, as it consist of nudes, or seminudes. Anyone who has ever had any contact with fine art would be aware of this fact.

The covers of FA and AS, and the inside illustrations, are art, even though some of the readers

DRUNKENNESS

ruins health, happiness. ALCOREM may help you in your home. When you begin to drink, a few drops of ALCOREM ELIMINATES DESIRE FOR MORE ALCOHOL, NO BOOKS TO READ. ALCOREM is a READY-TO-USE FORMULA, and is the only low priced method sold under a GUARANTEE OF SATISFACTION OR YOUR MONEY BACK. Can be given with or without drinker's knowledge. Not a cure, but a means of temporarily BREAKING DRINKING CYCLE. Does not seek to remove underlying psychiatric cause of addiction, but is a method of withdrawal of alcohol. ALCOREM IS INTENDED TO BUILD AN AVERSION, OR DISLIKE, TO ALCOHOL WITHOUT INTERFERING WITH THE SOCIAL OR WORKING LIFE OF THE DRINKER, except for a number of hours. The duration of the aversion to alcohol may vary from a few days to longer periods, or possibly may even be permanent in some cases. One happy user writes: "PLEASE SEND ME MORE WONDERFUL ALCOREM AT ONCE FOR A FRIEND WHO IS A HEAVY DRINKER. I BOUGHT FROM YOU BEFORE AND HAD WONDERFUL RESULTS ON ALL FOR WHOM I BOUGHT." SEND NAME AND ADDRESS—then pay postman $5.00 plus a few cents C.O.D. charges. To save C.O.D. charges, send $5.00 with your order. ALCOREM and instructions sent in plain wrapper.

MIDWEST HEALTH AIDS • DEPT. P-10
608 SO. DEARBORN STREET • CHICAGO 5, ILL.

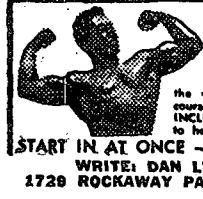
RUPTURED?

Get Relief This Proven Way

Why try to worry along with trusses that gouge your flesh—press heavily on hips and spine—enlarge opening—fail to hold rupture? You need the Cluthe. No leg-straps or cutting belts. Automatic adjustable pad holds at real opening — follows every body movement with instant increased support in case of strain. Cannot slip whether at work or play. Light. Waterproof. Can be worn in bath. Send for amazing FREE book, "Advice To Ruptured," and details of liberal truthful 60-day trial offer. Also endorsements from grateful users in your neighborhood. Write:

Cluthe Sons, Dept. 652, Bloomfield, New Jersey

DEVELOP MUSCLES LIKE MINE
Says Dan Lurie "America's Most Muscular Man"



Learn how I built a powerful body. Find new strength, pep, vitality. Have the build you've always wanted, simply by following my amazing new course. It's easy and it's fun. Easy-to-understand, over 75 how-to-do-it pictures. Every Mr. America and the best built men in the world have used this proven method. Complete course only $5 postpaid. Do not send stamps please. INCLUDED FREE—4—11" x 22" illustrated wall charts to help you to learn.

START IN AT ONCE — SEND FOR YOUR COURSE TODAY!
WRITE: DAN LURIE, PERSONAL, DEPT. 164
1729 ROCKAWAY PARKWAY BROOKLYN 12, N. Y.

DRAW for MONEY . . . Be an ARTIST!

Trained Artists are Capable of Earning $60, $75 and MORE a WEEK!

YOU CAN learn to draw at home in your spare time the well-known WSA way. COMMERCIAL ART, DESIGNING, CARTOONING all in ONE complete course. No previous Art experience necessary—we teach you step-by-step. Prepare for a fascinating hobby or profitable career. For 34 years WSA graduates have been making good—WHY NOT YOU?

VETERANS! WSA Approved for Training Under G. I. Bill. Write for FREE BOOK, "Art for Pleasure & Profit", fully describes course, our method of instruction and commercial opportunities for you. TWO ART OUTFITS included with training.

MAIL COUPON TODAY FOR DETAILS.

Washington School of Art, Studio 922R
1115—15th St., N.W., Washington 5, D. C.
Please send me full information and your Free Book, "Art for Pleasure and Profit."

Name.....AGE.....
Street.....
City.....Zone....State.....
☐ I am entitled to training under "G. I." Bill.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

High School Course at Home — **Many Finish in 2 Years**

Go as rapidly as your time and abilities permit. Course equivalent to resident school work—prepares for college entrance exams. Standard H.S. texts supplied. Diploma. Credit for H. S. subjects already completed. Single subjects if desired. High school education is very important for advancement in business and industry and socially. Don't be handicapped all your life. Be a High School graduate. Start your training now. Free Bulletin on request. No obligation.

American School, Dept. H 282, Drexel at 58th, Chicago 37

THEY'RE SUPER SCOPES!

36" 17 POWER

Extends to 36 inches. Precision and Polished Lenses. Ideal for Studying Stars, Plane Spotting, etc. Satisfaction Guaranteed or Money Refunded. Send Check or Money order to

CRITERION CO., Dept. D-2
438 Asylum St., Hartford 3, Conn.

$2.50 Postpaid

ILLUSTRATED COMIC BOOKLETS

THE KIND MEN LIKE!

(VEST POCKET SIZE)

They are loaded with rare cartoons. Full of Fun and Humor. ***20 DIFFERENT*** booklets sent prepaid for $1 in plain sealed wrapper. No C.O.D.'s.

GRAYKO, Dept. 1394 Box 520, G.P.O., N.Y.C. 1

BE A DETECTIVE

WORK HOME or TRAVEL. Experience unnecessary. **DETECTIVE** Particulars FREE. Write to **GEO. Z. WAGNER,** 125 W. 86th St., N.Y.

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING

Song Poems

POEMS wanted for musical setting. Send poems for Free examination. Hamann Service, 612 Manhattan Building, Milwaukee, Wisc.

POEMS wanted to be set to music. Free examination. Send poems today to McNeil, Master of Music, 510 ZD South Alexander Ave., Los Angeles, Calif.

SONGWRITERS Attention. Poems wanted, any subject, for musical setting. Free examination. Write a winner and I will help you put it over! C. Auburn, Park House, St. Pete, Fla.

Miscellaneous

MAGAZINES (back dated), foreign, domestic, arts. Books, booklets, subscriptions, etc. Catalog 10c (refunded). Cicerone's Center, 863 First Ave., New York 17, N. Y.

MAIL order offers increased income, independence, unlimited possibilities. Free literature. Manhattan House, 126A Lexington, New York 16, N. Y.

SCIENTIFICTION! "Vicarion" (Regular $2.50), only $1.00! Catalogs, 10c (refunded). Stone, Lunenburg 21, Mass.

WOULD you pay 8% first $350 made? Color illustrated book "505 Odd, Successful Enterprises" free. Some offer occasional day off. Work home. Expect something odd. Pacific 5J, Oceanside, Calif.

SCIENTIFICTION, weird, fantastic: books, magazines. Werewolf Bookshop, 1508A Riverside Dr., Verona, Pa.

BOOKS on any subject. Convenient 25c exchange plan. Here's how: Send titles etc. of 10 books you wish to exchange and types wanted. Send 25c and you will receive names and address of persons having types you desire. Nationwide Exchange, Box 328, Lima 1, Ohio.

PHONOGRAPH Records 20c. Catalogue. Paramount, AF-313 East Market, Wilkes-Barre, Pa.

are not able to recognize it. Keep up the good quality of the illustrations, inside and out, and don't let a few who do not understand art injure one of the more beautiful parts of two fine books.

Newton William Hooton,
1400 East 53rd St.,
Chicago, Ill.

A very intelligent, and reasonable discussion of a somewhat controversial subject, Newton. We'll put ourselves out on a limb and say we think you've got something. But we'll let the other readers have their chance to talk about it too. So how about it gang?.....Ed.

THE YEAR'S TWELVE BEST

Sirs:

Last March you said you wanted my comments for 1948. Well, here they are, the twelve best novels of the year, in order of my preference:

1. "Secret of the Serpent" by Wilcox. You certainly started out the year with a bang.
2. "This Way to Heaven" by Harold Sherman. His "Green Man" was a classic, but this yarn nearly topped it. Nice going.
3. "Lavender Vine of Death" by Wilcox.
4. "Lair of the Grimalkin" by G. H. Irwin.
5. "Zero A.D." by Lee Francis. A great new idea.
6. "Man from Yesterday" again by Francis.
7. "Forgotten Worlds" by Chandler. A little too drawn out.
8. "Slaves of the Worm" by Dick Shaver.
9. "Queen of the Panther World" by Livingston.
10. "Dimensions Unlimited" also by Livingston.
11. "Brainstorm" by Alex Blade. (Did this belong strictly in FA?)
12. "The Black Arrow" by Wood. The last on the list. A hardly readable yarn.

The best novelette of the year was "The Spirit of Toffee." I would have ranked this higher, but I was including only the novels in the first twelve. I for one would like to see a "Toffee" story in every issue!

The best short story of the year was "My World Died Tonight" by Casey. A really beautiful little story. More like it.

Now we come to the covers. The three best covers were the May, October, and December issues. To be more specific, the cover for "Forgotten Worlds" which was really superb; the cover for "This Way to Heaven"—man, what colors!—and the cover for "Outlaws of Corpus." Best space ship cover of the year. Also excellent were the July, January, and September covers. Hang on to Jones, he's a gem. I'd rather see him on the cover than Finlay. But keep Virgil inside, please.

I got such a wonderful response from my last letter that I'll ask again. Does any fan want to correspond with me? I'm 14, myself. All letters will be answered.

This letter seems to be longer than my last one,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

but maybe that's because I had 12 issues to talk about instead of 8 like last year. Believe me, this year was an improvement.

Bill Searles,
617 37th St.,
West Palm Beach, Fla.

O.K. Bill, now we'll sit back and wait for your next report. We're glad you think the past twelve issues have been an improvement. But wait for the coming year! And as to a "Toffee" story each issue, well, at least we've got one this month! We'll tell Charlies Myers to step it up!.....Ed.

ON STF IN GENERAL

Sirs:

I wish to say a few words about your December issue of FA, and stf in general.

Alexander Blade is a very good writer. He has a fertile imagination, and a cleverness with detailed background. He is never at a loss for ideas, analogies, and similar, that are like spice to a cake. I think he can be trusted to have the correct solution to "Brainstorm." It is a very clever story. I wonder if Alex ever went through prefrontal lobotomy himself. He handled the theme like an eyewitness.

I wish you could get Virgil Finlay to do all your illustrations. I admire the wonderfully smooth and stereoscopic effect he obtains with tattoo techniques. Other styles are not as effective as Finlay's work.

I thought that "Fountain of Change" was quite good. The description of various cults is very apt, and I should know, for I have belonged to one of them at one time. Shaver gives the impression that he has studied many things out carefully, but instead of telling them in a serious article, he prefers to give them in the form of fiction. He well knows that the real truth about life and reality is usually f a n t a s t i c and unbelievable, although "science" tries to make us believe otherwise.

In this connection let me say that I like your little feature articles very much. My only objection is that some of them are too short. Especially the one about the "Magic Circle" by William Karney. I've heard of this before, but I would like more factual and objective information about it. Science never properly explains anything to my satisfaction. I am an ardent Charles Fort fan. It has been my experience that when science finds itself in an embarrassing situation it tries to alibi out of it somehow, as in the case of the mysterious fires in the mid-west farm home. The investigation finally pinned the blame on a young girl, but didn't do anything at all for the act of alleged arson—yet they never said she was insane. A peculiar circumstance.

I wish you would tell your feature writers that those stories of savage torture in native feasts and orgies are not cruelties motivated by hate. The victims are usually voluntary, and the driving power is sex. In "Trial by Torture" by Hilary Cowen, it is said that two young people were selected for the torture: "All the young people

COLD KEEP YOU BEDRIDDEN

● Reduce that fever . . . relieve that pain . . . avoid the discomfort of that aching feeling . . . with DYREL. Yes . . . Dyrel is a combination of proven chemical components frequently prescribed by doctors to alleviate suffering due to common colds, grippe, sore throat and minor respiratory infections. Stop feeling "under-par" due to a minor cold. Order DYREL . . . send $1.00 for 24 tablets and we pay the postage; or have DYREL sent C.O.D. and you pay the postage.

NORTHEASTERN LABORATORIES
Dept. D Buffalo 4, N. Y.

BE YOUR OWN BOSS!

7 WAYS TO EARN $5,000 TO $50,000 YEARLY

NO PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE and $15 or less capital to start. Follow any of the SEVEN sure-fire methods outlined in this new book. Written in simple down-to-earth language. Be respected in your community and make big money. Others have done it and so can you. SEND NO MONEY, pay postman $1 plus few cents postage on delivery, for this revealing new book. Write TODAY!

WEALTH BOOK, Box 82, Dept. MW2, Lincoln, Nebr.

INVENTORS

Patent laws encourage the development of inventions. Our firm is registered to practice before the U. S. Patent Office. Write for further particulars as to patent protection and procedure and "Invention Record" form at once. No obligation.

McMORROW, BERMAN & DAVIDSON
Registered Patent Attorneys
186-Z Victor Building Washington 1, D. C.

HOLLYWOOD Model of the Month

A beautiful Hollywood Model is selected each month . . . and portrayed in 5 glamorous color poses. Send for "Miss February" Now!
Set of 5 Color Slides.....$2.00
Set of 5 Fine Grain Negatives.....1.00
Address all orders to
JAMES J. BRADFORD
1302 Broadway Burbank, Calif.

● MECHANICS • HOME STUDY

Step up your own skill with facts & figures of your trade. Audels Mechanics Guides contain Practical Inside Trade Information in handy form. Fully Illustrated. Easy to Understand. Highly Endorsed. Check book you want for 7 days' Free Examination. Send no Money. Nothing to pay postman. ☐Carpentry $6 • ☐Auto $4 • ☐ Oil Burners $1 ☐Sheet Metal $1 • ☐Welding $1 • ☐ Refrigeration $4 ☐Plumbing $6 • ☐Masonry $6 • ☐Painting $2 • ☐Radio $4 ☐Electricity $4 • ☐Mathematics $2 • ☐Steam Engineers $4 ☐Machinist $4 • ☐Blueprint $2 • ☐Diesel $2 • ☐Drawing $2. If satisfied you pay only $1 a month until price is paid.
AUDEL, Publishers, 49 W. 23 St., New York 10, N. Y.

Free Book

RAISE HAMSTERS

The new wonder animals from Syria. Often called Toy Bears. Delightful pets Everyone wants them. Laboratories need thousands. Clean, odorless. Raise anywhere. A profitable and interesting hobby or business. We furnish breeders and instructions. Write today for free book.
GULF HAMSTERY, 1551 BASIL ST., MOBILE, ALA.

ILLUSTRATED COMIC BOOKLETS
Sell our ILLUSTRATED COMIC BOOKLETS and other NOVELTIES. Each booklet size 4½ x 2¾. We will send 25 assorted booklets prepaid upon receipt of $1.00 or 75 assorted booklets sent prepaid upon receipt of $2.00. Wholesale novelty price list sent with order only. No orders sent C.O.D. Send Cash or Money order. Repeat Sales Co., 65 Fifth Ave., Dept. 40-B New York 3, N. Y.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Here's the Way to Curb a Rupture

Successful Home Method That Anyone Can Use On Any Reducible Rupture Large or Small

COSTS NOTHING TO FIND OUT

Thousands of ruptured men will rejoice to know that the full plan so successfully used by Capt. W. A. Collings for his double rupture from which he suffered so long will be sent free to all who write for it.

Merely send your name and address to Capt. W. A. Collings, Inc., Box 579 D, Watertown, N. Y. It won't cost you a cent to find out and you may bless the day you sent for it. Hundreds have already reported satisfactory results following this free offer. Send right away—NOW before you put down this paper.

LEARN HOW TO HYPNOTIZE

Amazing self-study lessons . . . in simple, easy to understand language. How to select a subject—how to hypnotize by telephone—how to make money from hypnotism—mental telepathy—stage hypnotism—self-hypnosis: how modern hypnotism is used to conquer inferiority complex, fear, battle fatigue, timidity, etc. Clear *helpful pictures* show operating positions, movements. Money-back guarantee. Only $1.95, postpaid—or COD, plus postage. Write today!

Nelson-Hall Co., 1139 S. Wabash Ave., Dept. B-56, Chicago 5, Ill.

DO YOU WANT TO STOP TOBACCO?

Banish the craving for tobacco as thousands have with Tobacco Redeemer. Write for free booklet telling of injurious effect of tobacco and of a treatment which has relieved many men.

35 Years in Business
300,000 Satisfied Customers

FREE BOOK

THE NEWELL COMPANY
284 Clayton Sta., St. Louis 5, Mo.

Free Book

MOUNT BIRDS, ANIMALS, FISH

MAIL Postal Today

Yes, FREE. Explains Taxidermy. Tells how to learn at Home by mail to mount birds, animals, heads . . . to TAN skins and furs. Great for MEN and BOYS. Fun! Also earn money in spare time. WRITE TODAY—NOW—for free book containing 100 game pictures. State AGE.
N.W. School of Taxidermy, Dept. 4302, Omaha, Neb.

Learn Profitable Profession in 90 days at Home

Men and Women, 18 to 50

Many Swedish Massage graduates make $50, $75, or even more per week. Large full time incomes from doctors, hospitals, sanitoriums, clubs or private practice. Others make good money in spare time. You can win independence and prepare for future security by training at home and qualifying for diploma. Anatomy Charts and 32 page illustrated Book FREE —Now! The College of Swedish Massage
Dept. 983-B 41 E. Pearson, Chicago 11

SONGWRITERS

Poems Wanted at Once

Send your Poems, Any Subject, for Free Examination and FREE BOOK; "Your Future in Songwriting."

RADIO CITY MUSIC ACADEMY
1674 Broadway New York 19, N. Y.

curried the favor of the witch doctor."

The conclusion was inevitable that they wanted to be victims. They were all hopped up on home-made beverages. This gives a different slant about so-called savage peoples. It gives a reason why they prefer to remain as savages. If they let themselves get "civilized" they would have to give up their orgy practices.

About interplanetary stories—I think that theme has just about been played out. It was interesting a long time ago when stf first became popular, but has been overdone.

Time travel can never be made sensibly fantastic without glossing over a great many details.

As I said before, real truth is fantastic, but it also hangs together perfectly. Time travel stories cannot be made to hang together.

Tell your writers that if they are going to write with their tongues in their cheeks they might as well stop. No man can do a good story unless he half-way believes what he is writing about—or at least as a possibility.

S. K. Post,
6104 Gurden Ave.,
West Palm Beach, Fla.

Thanks for a very interesting letter. One item we'd like to comment on is the conclusion you draw from "Trial by Torture." We believe that Mr. Cowen was trying to impart the fact that the young people curried the witch-doctor's favor, not because they wanted to become victims, but because they didn't want to take part in the orgy. It would thus follow that the witch doctor might be inclined to select youths he did not like. However, as you say, there is room for discussion on this subject.

As for interplanetary and time travel stories, we cannot feel that either theme is worn-out. Interplanetary travel is one of the basic themes of science-fiction, and until man accomplishes the feat himself, it will still be a thing of the future, a theme to write about. As to time travel being impossible to write about, well, necessarily a writer must "gloss" over things not yet known. We also think we can best answer this by your last paragraph where you state that writers should at least half-believe what they write about. This is the one real reason why time travel stories are popular—because the writers are fascinated with its possibilities, however remote. When they write a time travel story they are putting on paper something they hope will be accepted as possible, if not probable.

We agree with you on the mysterious fires in that farm home being unsatisfactorily explained by science. From all the accounts we read in the papers, it seemed that the fires started under the very eyes of witnesses. This, we think, would eliminate the "explanation" that the young girl was responsible. If she had been, then it would follow that numerous people would have seen her commit the acts of arson. Like you, we do not accept the bland explanation that was given.—Ed.

PRINTED IN U.S.A.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

And to think they used to call me SKINNY!

Give Me 15 Minutes A Day And I'll Give You A NEW BODY

PEOPLE used to laugh at my skinny, 97 lb. body. I was so embarrassed at my weakling build that I was ashamed to strip for sports or for a swim. Girls snickered and made fun of me behind my back. THEN I discovered my marvelous new muscle-building system—*"Dynamic Tension."* And it turned me into such a *complete* specimen of MANHOOD that today I hold the title "THE WORLD'S MOST PERFECTLY DEVELOPED MAN."

That's how I traded in my "bag of bones" for a barrel of muscle! And I felt so much better, so much on *top of the world* in my big new, husky body, that I decided to devote my whole life to helping other fellows change themselves into "perfectly developed men."

WHAT'S MY SECRET?

When you look in the mirror and see a healthy, husky, strapping fellow smiling back at you—then you'll be astonished at how *short* a time it takes *"Dynamic Tension"* to GET RESULTS!

Dynamic Tension" is the easy, NATURAL method that you can practice in the privacy of your own room—JUST 15 MINUTES EACH DAY—while your scrawny shoulder muscles begin to swell . . . those spindly arms and legs of yours bulge . . . and your whole body starts to feel "alive," full of zip and go!

No "ifs," "ands," or "maybes." Just tell me *where* you want handsome, powerful muscles. Are you fat and flabby? Or skinny and gawky? Are you short-winded, pepless? Do you hold back and let others walk off with the prettiest girls, best jobs, etc.? Then write for my FREE Book about *"Dynamic Tension"* and learn how I can make you a healthy, confident, powerful HE-MAN.

Thousands of other fellows are becoming marvelous physical specimens—my way. I give you no gadgets or contraptions to fool with. When you have learned to develop your strength through *"Dynamic Tension,"* you can laugh at artificial muscle-makers. You simply utilize the dormant muscle-power, in your own body—watch it increase and multiply into real, solid LIVE MUSCLE.

FREE BOOK

Mail the coupon right now for full details and I'll send you my illustrated book, "Everlasting Health and Strength." Tells all about my *"Dynamic Tension"* method. Shows actual photos of men I've made into Atlas Champions. It's a valuable book! And it's FREE. Send for your copy today. Mail the coupon to me personally. CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 110P, 115 E. 23rd St., New York 10, N. Y.

CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 110P
115 East 23rd Street, New York 10, N. Y.

I want the proof that your system of *"Dynamic Tension"* will help make a New Man of me—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscular development. Send me your free book, "Everlasting Health and Strength."

Name..... Age.....
(Please print or write plainly)

Address .....

City..... State.....

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ACTION!

THRILLS!

SUSPENSE!

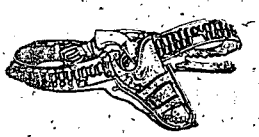
EVERYTHING MOVES
A Mile A Minute!

Glory in the thunder of pounding hoofs, the desperate deeds of brave men as they fight for life, love and home in the lustiest, boldest, most dangerous country the world has ever known, the Great American West! Thrill to the smell of gunsmoke as men-of-steel tame a wild country and make love to the courageous women who accompany them into adventure. Hold your breath as hot lead and hotter passion scorches the open range.

NOWHERE IN AMERICA CAN YOU FIND BETTER STORIES THAN THESE!

Every story is carefully selected, every story is top notch. They are the best stories money can buy, and editorial experience can produce. Prove it to yourself . . . Read:

MAMMOTH
WESTERN



ONCE YOU'VE READ IT, YOU'LL NEVER STOP!

ON SALE AT YOUR NEWSSTAND NOW!

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED